Timothy Taylor

Bird's opening

detailed coverage of an underrated and dynamic choice for White

EVERYMAN CHESS

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PREFACE

Every chess player who plays the Bird's (including myself, and I have played the opening throughout my chess career) has had the following experience. Someone will come up to you, regardless of whether you have won or lost your game, and ask, 'Why are you playing that unsound opening?' I have learned that there is no good answer – no matter what you say, your new 'friend' will not be convinced. Even at the board, weak players will look hungrily at your king after 1 f4, perhaps supposing that you have practically helpmated yourself. Strong players will sniff disapprovingly, as though it were impossible for a real chess player to venture such a move.

And yet these same players will play the Dutch Defence without a qualm. They will tell you how much they learned from Botvinnik's classic book, One Hundred Selected Games – a book littered with Dutch Defences!

What is the main line of the Bird's? Look in any statistical database and the result is always the same: by far the most popular answer to 1 f4 is 1...d5. On Chessgames.com, for example, that is the answer 499 times, with 212 for the next most popular, From's 1...e5. In short, more than twice as many players prefer 1...d5 – but what exactly is 1 f4 d5? It is precisely a Dutch in reverse, with an extra tempo.

If chess has any logic at all, and I believe that it does, then if the Dutch is a sound opening for Black (and countless grandmasters and world champions agree) it must be good with an extra move!

Yet people still persist in labelling 1 f4 unsound! Perhaps the From's Gambit marks the unsoundness? But no – my research (and my own play) shows that From's Gambit is barely sound (if that). After all, Black gives up both centre pawns for a temporary initiative. If White avoids the traps there is every chance of a win.

The other counters such as 1...c5 and 1...♘f6 do not challenge the Bird's, and therefore cannot question its soundness. But the chorus continues. I think of this as a kind of mass hallucination. Consider Chapter One of this book, where I address the Classical System, which in the Bird's goes like this: 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e3 ♗g7 4 ♗e2 ♘f6 5 0-0 0-0 6 d3 c5, and in the Dutch goes like this: 1 d4 f5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♗g2 e6 4 ♘f3 ♗e7

5 0-0 0-0 6 c4 d6.

These are, of course, identical positions, except that the Bird player is to move, while the Dutch player must first wait for his opponent.

Let's see what contemporary strong players think of these positions, and mouse over to ChessBase.com. If we set up the Dutch position, and find out how many players over 2400 have played it (by using rating as a guide we limit the sample to games played since FIDE ratings were introduced – in other words, we won't see any Alekhine or Morphy battles, although both played the Dutch). The results come up and we get a healthy 46 games. Evidently a sizeable number of strong players believe this is a good fighting defence.

Now, with the same rating floor, let's see how many strong players of our time like the exact same position with a tempo more. The answer? Two!! Now let's adjust the criteria and move the rating floor up to 2500 – we still see 13 fearless Classical Dutch players, all GMs or IMs, but we don't find a single Bird player rated that high.

But it's the same position! White gets an extra move. Moreover White can practically force the Classical System against 1...d5. And White has at least as much of a chance at an advantage here as in any other opening, and far more room for independent thought as the lines have been so little studied. One could create an innovation on move seven (try to do that in the Sicilian Dragon!).

Now we come to the heart of the matter: who is this book for? If you want to go with the crowd, if you are afraid someone will laugh at you for opening with the f-pawn (and they will), if you want to play what someone who never even looked at the Bird's thinks is correct, then this book is *not* for you. But if you are an independent thinker, if you can make the simple analogy that the Dutch with a move in hand cannot be bad, and should be good; if you can see that the Bird, just like the respected English, seizes an important central square but, unlike the English, also aims a pawn at the black king; if you enjoy the thought of forcing Black into *your* opening on the very first move (instead of the 1 e4 player having to contend with Sicilians, Frenches, Caro-Kanns, etc.), then this opening is indeed for you.

I don't claim that this book is an exhaustive study. Much of it breaks new ground, and some of the new ideas have barely been tried. I also endeavour to give the Bird player a complete repertoire against all possible continuations.

A personal note: in two of the most critical tournaments of my life, Lone Pine 1978, and the HB Global Challenge, Minneapolis 2005, I played the Bird's exclusively with White. In 1978 I defeated my first GM with the Bird's (Ken Rogoff) and made my first IM norm. In 2005 I defeated two GMs (Rodrigo Vasquez and Julio Becerra) with 1 f4, and won more money than I ever had before in a single chess event!

I should also point out that I don't play the Bird's to steer clear of the 'book' and settle for a level position – I play the Bird's to *win*.

I hope you, dear reader, will do the same.

Timothy Taylor,
USA
October 2005

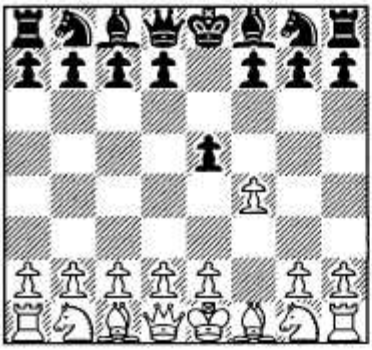
INTRODUCTION

The Historical Bird

Bird's Opening, 1 f4, has been played since the 17th century, and quite possibly earlier. The following quick blow-out is the earliest game I can find.

Game 1
Greco-NN
Europe 1620

1 f4 e5



2 fxe5 ♕h4+?

Overcome by White's audacity in 'exposing' his king to check so early, Black makes haste to deliver that very punch – but a grave disappointment awaits! Of course the normal gambit move is 2...d6, while 2...♘c6 is also playable.

3 g3 ♕e4 4 ♘f3

White already has a clear advantage, and it's going to get worse for Black.

4...♘c6 5 ♘c3 ♕f5 6 e4 ♕e6 7 d4 ♕e7 8 ♗g5 ♕b4 9 a3 ♕xb2 10 ♘a4 1-0

The queen falls.

While the quality of Black's play was not exactly of GM calibre here, the point of view – that the advance of the f-pawn should not be taken seriously, that White's position can be overrun at once – persists even today, which is a lucky break for all of us Bird practitioners!

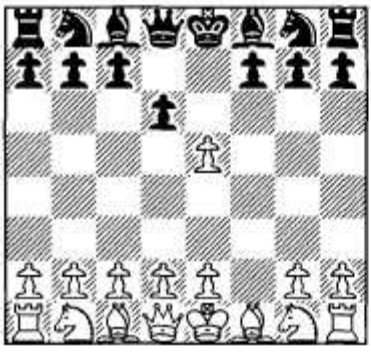
The opening got its modern name when it was taken up and championed by the English player Henry Edward Bird (1830-1898). Bird, like Bent Larsen in more recent times, enjoyed offbeat, original openings (Bird's defence to the Ruy Lopez, 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 ♘d4!?, for example, involves making

two of Black's first three moves with the same piece). Bird never captured the world championship, but he came close, narrowly losing a match to Wilhelm Steinitz in 1866 when Steinitz was recognized as the world's strongest player (although the first *official* world championship match would not occur until Steinitz-Zukertort in 1886). The score of the Steinitz-Bird match was 9.5-7.5, and it is interesting that if Bird had won his sole outing with the Bird's Opening (in which, after blunders on both sides, he reached a clearly superior position) he would have tied the match.

Here is a nice Bird win (in both senses of the word) against another world championship contender, Joseph Blackburne, who would also lose a match to Steinitz, but by the rather more disastrous score of 7-0!

Game 2
Bird-Blackburne
London 1879

1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6



From's Gambit is an audacious response to 1 f4, Black sacrificing a pawn with the idea of an immediate king hunt.

3 exd6 ♗xd6

Threatening mate in three!

4 ♘f3 ♘f6

The more popular, albeit – in my opinion – weaker alternative is Lasker's 4...g5 which, along with the text, will be treated in depth in Chapters 7 and 8.

5 d4 ♘e4

Instead 5...♘g4 6 ♕d3 c5 7 ♕e4+ ♗e6 8 ♘g5 ♗xh2 leads to the fiendishly complicated, almost incalculable main line, which was seen, for example, in Taylor-Mestel, Lone Pine 1978 (see Chapter 8, Game 40).

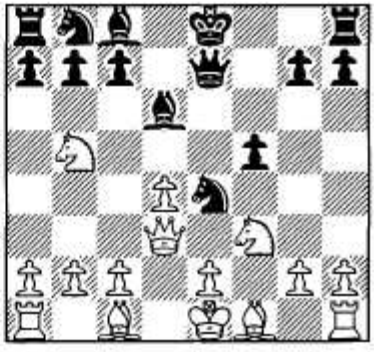
6 ♘c3 f5

Better is 6...♘xc3.

7 ♕d3 ♕e7

Now 7...♘xc3 fails to the intermezzo 8 ♗g5 ♗c7 9 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 when White can safely take on c3 with the queen, depriving Black of even structural compensation for the missing pawn.

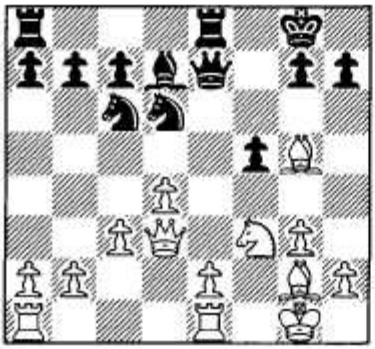
8 ♘b5!



Bird has no problem moving a piece twice in the opening. In fact the text has a solid positional purpose. Black's best attacking piece – essentially, it was the activity of this piece that prompted him

to sacrifice a pawn in the opening – is the dark-squared bishop. Once this cleric is eliminated, Black has no real compensation for the pawn.

8...♘c6 9 ♘xd6+ ♕xd6 10 c3 0-0 11 g3 ♖e8 12 ♗g2 ♕e7 13 0-0 ♘d6 14 ♖e1 ♗d7 15 ♗g5

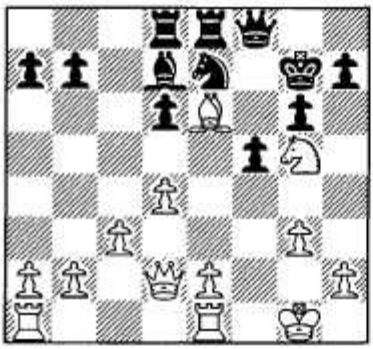


White smoothly completes his development and soon switches over to attacking mode.

15...♕f8 16 ♗f4 ♖ad8 17 ♘g5! g6

17...h6 18 ♗d5+ ♔h8 19 ♗xd6 doesn't help.

18 ♗xd6 cxd6 19 ♗d5+ ♔g7 20 ♕d2 ♘e7 21 ♗e6



Crushing.

21...♘g8 22 d5 ♘f6 23 ♗xd7 ♖xd7 24 ♘e6+♖xe6 25 dxe6 ♖e7 26 ♕xd6 ♕e8 27 ♖ad1

White is up the exchange and a pawn, and the rest presents no difficulties.

27...♖xe6 28 ♕c7+ ♖e7 29 ♕d8 ♕f7 30 ♖d6 ♖e8 31 ♕a5 b6 32 ♕b5 ♕e7 33 ♕d3 ♕f7 34 c4 ♖e7 35 ♖d1 h5 36 ♕c3 ♖c7 37 b3 ♕e7 38 ♕d4 ♔f7 39 b4 g5 40 c5 bxc5 41 bxc5 ♘e4 42 ♕d5+ ♔g7 43 ♖d7 ♖xd7 44 ♕xd7 ♔f6 45 ♕xe7+ ♔xe7 46 c6 1-0

Black resigns in view of 46...♘d6 47 c7 ♘c8 48 ♖d8.

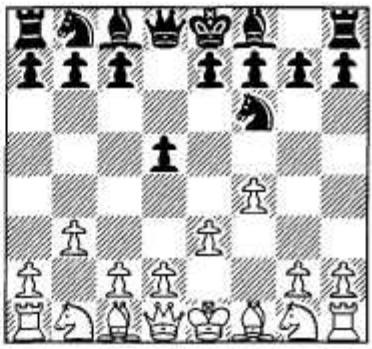
World champions, including even our own Vladimir Kramnik, have tried the Bird's from time to time, but far and away the most famous world champion/Bird win is the following game. In fact, thanks to its brilliant combination, this is one of the most famous games of chess ever played, regardless of the opening.

Game 3

Em.Lasker-Bauer

Amsterdam 1889

1 f4 d5 2 e3 ♘f6 3 b3



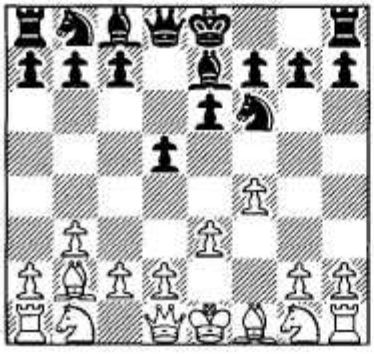
Lasker plays in his typical provocative style, avoiding the natural and superior 3 ♘f3. He gets away with it, but Nimzowitsch – see below – was not so fortunate!

3...e6

Too solid – Black should allow himself to be provoked! Correct is to cross the centre demarcation with 3...d4, when White's pawn structure will crack no matter what he plays.

Nimzowitsch-Steiner (Game 18) continued 4 ♗d3 dxe3 5 dxe3 e5 and Black had an excellent game. Incidentally, Nimzowitsch had an overwhelming score with the Bird: 5 wins (including one – speaking of world champions – against Max Euwe) two draws, and only that one loss to Steiner.

4 ♗b2 ♗e7



5 ♗d3

Lasker sets up his raking bishops to attack Black's kingside – but this idea, while brilliantly successful here, would hardly work against modern defensive measures.

Indeed, as Black, Nimzowitsch (with his love of prophylaxis) would have nipped this attack in the bud but, Bauer being no Nimzowitsch, we get to see the birth of a new combination!

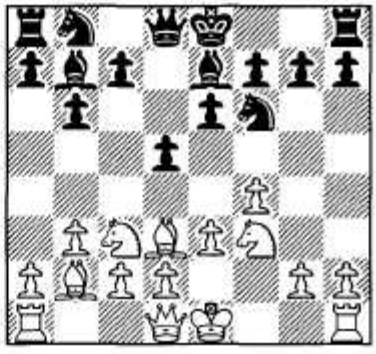
5...b6

One way to stop the danger immediately would be 5...♘e4!? 6 ♘f3 (6 ♗xg7? ♖g8) 6...♗h4+ 7 g3 ♗f6, neutralizing both of White's mighty bishops!

6 ♘f3 ♗b7

6...♗a6 is another way to eliminate White's bishop pair.

7 ♘c3



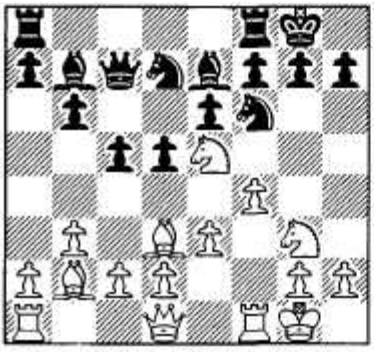
Usually in these fianchetto lines White develops this piece by way of d2-d3 and ♘d2 (see Fischer-Mecking, Game 6). Here, because of Lasker's eccentric (but aggressive) development of the light-squared bishop, the knight has to go to this awkward square. Clearly the piece belongs on the kingside (♘e2-g3) – and if it gets there without cost it can do serious damage – but, objectively, Black could equalize easily by snapping off a white bishop while all this is happening.

7...♘bd7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♘e2 c5

This is not a bad move but, from a practical standpoint, much simpler is 9...♘c5, eliminating the dangerous bishop while also spoiling White's pawn structure (unless Lasker would be willing

to play something like 10 ♘e5 ♘d3 11 ♘d3 c5, when Black has no problems). But again, I must state that Bauer's actual move, for all the criticism it has received over the years, is not an objective mistake, and Black has, in fact, reasonable chances at this point.

10 ♘g3 ♕c7 11 ♘e5



11...♘xe5

This move is also not bad, but Black should take advantage of a tactical opportunity and strike with 11...d4!, which is a common theme in the fianchetto lines: Black shuts out the dark-squared bishop. Here it works, despite insufficient control of d4, because of a tactic based on the exposed g1-a7 diagonal (another common Bird theme, and something all Bird players must take into account – sometimes the white king *really* is exposed!).

After 11...d4 play could continue 12 exd4 cxd4 13 ♗xd4 ♗c5 (the tactic mentioned above) 14 c3 ♘xe5 15 fxe5 ♕xe5 and Black is slightly better. Therefore White should not take the pawn but play 13 ♕e2, when 13...♕d6 leads to an approximately equal game, as White still has kingside play, but his bishop suffers.

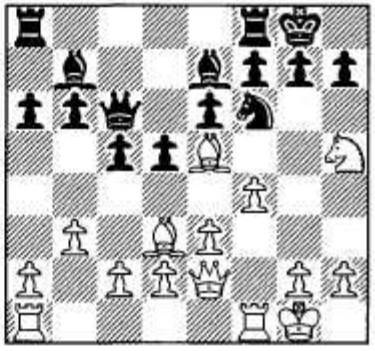
12 ♗xe5 ♕c6 13 ♕e2

White has to cover the mate threat before he attacks; the impetuous 13 ♘h5 would only give Black counterplay after 13...d4.

13...a6?

Black fails to sense the danger, reacting to the sham threat of ♗b5 and completely missing the cyclone heading for his king! Even now Black could keep an approximately level game in two ways. 13...♘d7 attacks a dangerous bishop; apparently Bauer did not respect those pieces. Now the immediate assault with 14 ♗xh7+ leads only to a draw after 14...♔xh7 15 ♕h5+ ♔g8 16 ♗xg7, while 14 ♗b5 ♕c8 15 ♘h5 f6 16 ♕g4 ♖f7 also shuts down White's play. Alternatively, Black can play (as on move 5!) 13...♘e4, again obstructing a dangerous bishop, with equality.

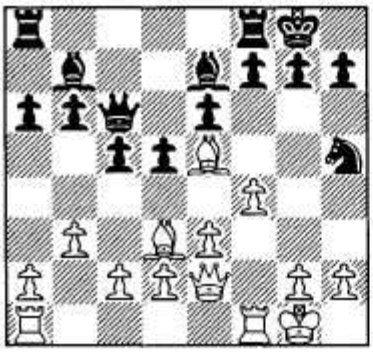
14 ♘h5!



Now Lasker has finally set up the attacking position he's been aiming for, and there is no valid defence, e.g. 14...d4 15 ♘xf6+ (15 ♗xf6, with the idea of ♕g4, also leads to a powerful attack) 15...♗xf6 (15...gxf6 16 ♖f3 fxe5 17 ♗xh7+ ♔h8 [17...♔g7 18 ♖g3+ ♔f6 19

♕h5 and mates] 18 ♖g3 mates or wins the queen) 16 exd4 cxd4 17 ♗xf6 gxf6 18 ♖f3 and White wins at least a pawn. Also, 14...♘e8 loses to 15 ♗xg7! with the idea of ♕g4, and the relatively best 14...♖fd8 (giving the king somewhere to run) allows 15 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 16 ♗xh7+! (intending to meet 16...♔xh7? with the crushing 17 ♕h5+ ♔g8 18 ♗xf6 gxf6 19 ♕h6 and Black can only watch in horror as White forces mate with ♖f3-g3 etc.) 16...♔f8 and Black can 'continue to resist a pawn down' (Kasparov) but that would be a thankless task against a player of Lasker's ability!

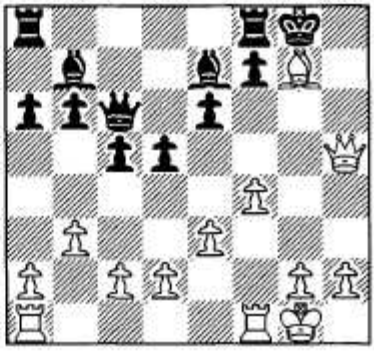
14...♘xh5



15 ♗xh7+!

The cyclone hits. White begins an extraordinary combination which, as far as I know, is the first double bishop sacrifice of its kind. Later, Tarrasch won in similarly grand style against Nimzowitsch (St. Petersburg 1914) and other players have duplicated the feat since (Leonid Stein and Bill Lombardy come to mind, but I, alas, have yet to have the opportunity!). One could say that this sac is now part of the mental arsenal of all attacking players – but to conceive this over the board for the first time was a feat of genius.

15...♔xh7 16 ♕xh5+ ♔g8 17 ♗xg7!!



Like an unstoppable force of nature, Lasker keeps coming!

17....♔xg7

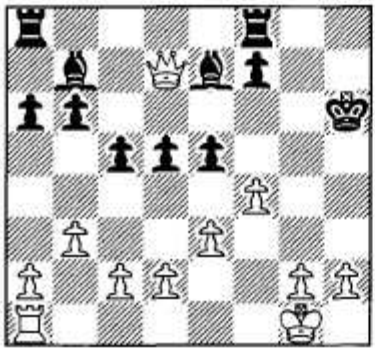
Declining is no better: 17...f5 18 ♗e5 ♖f6 19 ♖f3 ♔f8 20 ♖g3 and White forces mate. 17...f6 18 ♖f3 ♕e8 19 ♕h8+ ♔f7 20 ♕h7 gives White a winning attack, e.g. 20...♕d8 (20...e5 21 f5 ♕d7 22 ♕g6+ ♔g8 23 ♗xf6 mate; 20...♕b8 21 ♗xf6+ ♔xf6 22 ♖h3 and mates) 21 ♕h5+ ♔g8 22 ♖g3 and Black better hurry the resignation.

18 ♕g4+ ♔h7 19 ♖f3 e5

It is clear that Black's every move is forced.

20 ♖h3+ ♕h6 21 ♖xh6+ ♔xh6 22 ♕d7!

The last sting of Lasker's brilliant combination: White wins one of the loose bishops, remaining with queen versus rook and bishop. Given his pawn superiority and continuing attacking chances, White has a relatively easy win, although Lasker finds an artistic way to close it out.



22...♗f6 23 ♕xb7 ♔g7 24 ♖f1 ♖ab8 25 ♕d7 ♖fd8 26 ♕g4+ ♔f8 27 fxe5 ♗g7 28 e6 ♖b7 29 ♕g6 f6 30 ♖xf6+! ♗xf6 31 ♕xf6+ ♔e8 32 ♕h8+ ♔e7 33 ♕g7+ ♔xe6 34 ♕xb7 ♖d6 35 ♕xa6 d4 36 exd4 cxd4 37 h4 d3 38 ♕xd3! 1-0

Black finally saw the light and resigned. This game shows the attacking power of the Bird if White is given time to line up his big guns. Nevertheless, one must recognize that Black had numerous defensive resources had he been aware of the very real danger hanging over his king.

World champions have not only won with the Bird, but like Max Euwe (mentioned above), they have also fallen victim to this unexpected opening. In this regard the number one giant killer is Bent Larsen, who defeated not one but *two* world champions with the Bird!

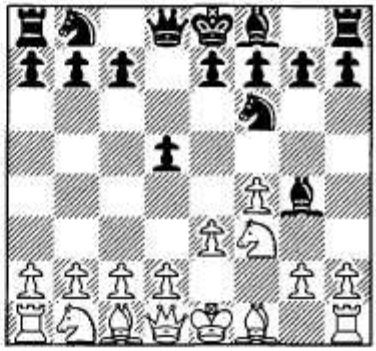
First, he takes out Tigran Petrosian.

Game 4

Larsen-Petrosian

Portoroz Interzonal 1958

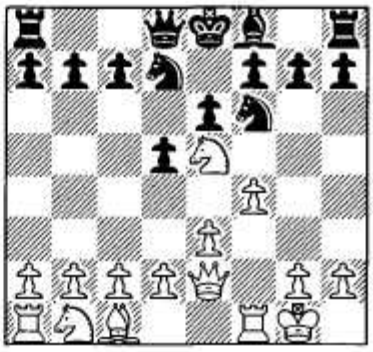
1 f4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 e3 ♗g4



4 ♗e2 ♘bd7 5 ♘e5?!

I don't believe White can get any advantage by voluntarily exchanging his good bishop, especially since the fine knight on e5 is costly to maintain, as will be seen. No doubt unsatisfied with the result of this opening, Bent later improved with 5 0-0 (Chapter 3, Game 19) and soon obtained a considerable advantage.

5...♗xe2 6 ♕xe2 e6 7 0-0



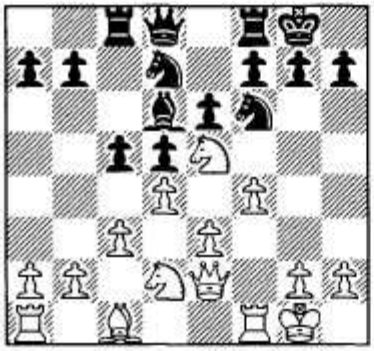
White must either give up control of e5 (usually a critical square in the Bird as this is the central outpost upon which White stakes a claim with his very first move) or, as Larsen does, enter a poor Stonewall where he has the inferior

bishop and a permanent hole on e4. Only slightly better is 7 b3 ♘xe5! (7...♗d6 is weaker – after 8 ♗b2 White kept an edge by maintaining the knight and efficiently activating the queen's bishop in Taylor-Banawa, Los Angeles 2005) 8 fxe5 ♘d7 9 ♗b2 ♕h4+ 10 ♕f2 and the ending is a bit better for Black in view of his superior bishop.

7...♗d6 8 d4

8 ♘xd7 ♕xd7, when Black is ready to push the e-pawn, would not inspire White.

8...0-0 9 ♘d2 c5 10 c3 ♖c8

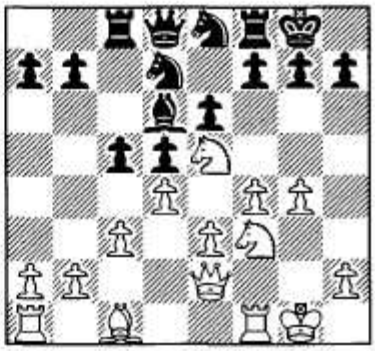


A glance at the diagram position reveals the key factors. Black has the far better bishop since all the centre pawns are on the colour of White's only bishop. White has a permanent hole on e4 which invites a black knight to camp out there, whereas White's outpost on e5 holds less significance as an eviction can be executed with a timely ...f7-f6. Black can open a file at will or gain space with ...c5-c4, while White, way behind in development, is a long way from generating anything on the kingside. This is not what you want when you play 1 f4... However, in a testament to the volatility and sometimes even mystical quality of chess, Larsen rises above his evident disadvantages and – with some Armenian assistance, to be sure – wins the game!

11 g4

Larsen, well aware of his difficulties, realizes his only chance is to mix it up.

11...♘e8 12 ♘df3

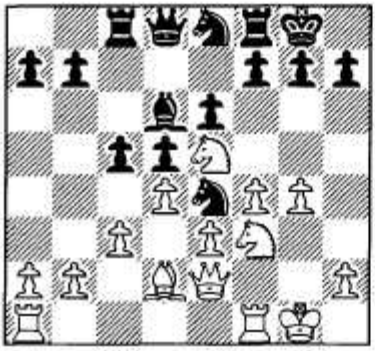


12...♘df6

This subtle, ever so Petrosian-style manoeuvre is undoubtedly the best move from a 'serious truth in chess' standpoint. Black will use both knights to completely dominate e4, while the similarly posted white knight will be evicted with gain of time later. This is all well and good, but if the average player is fortunate enough to reach this position with Black, then I might suggest taking the easy path: the simple 12...f6 13 ♘d3 (13 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 14 e4 dxe4 15 ♕xe4 cxd4 16 ♘xd4 ♗c5 17 ♗e3 ♘d6 18 ♕d3 ♖f7 is also better for Black) 13...c4 14 ♘de1 e5 breaks open the game for Black's better developed pieces. White has very little play in these lines, which also means that from Black's point of view there's less to go

wrong. Petrosian, as will be seen, finally gets lost in his own labyrinth!

13 ♗d2 ♘e4



14 ♗e1

Up until here Petrosian has created a strategic masterpiece, exacting drastic penance for White's mistaken fifth move. One more subtle touch would complete the encirclement of White's pieces, 14...c4! being the correct call. The difference between the opposing sides' knight outposts is then manifest. Black has a knight safe in its permanent hole on e4 but its opposite number on e5 is trapped and on the verge of being lost to the looming ...f7-f6!

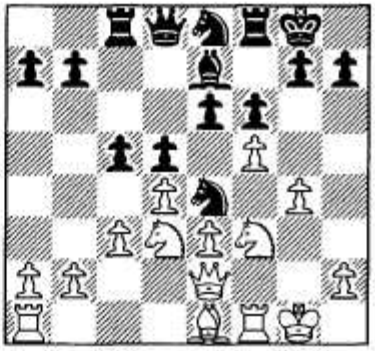
White has only two choices, both unpleasant:

a) Retreat with 15 ♘d2, when 15...♘xd2 16 ♕xd2 (16 ♗xd2 means the bishop spent two moves going to the kingside for nothing) 16...♘f6 17 ♗h4 ♘e4! gives Black an overwhelming positional advantage.

b) 15 g5 (another pawn on a dark square) 15...♗c7 (with the idea of ...♘d6) and the weak light squares attract Black's knights.

I don't think all of Larsen's renowned ingenuity could have saved him had Petrosian found 14...c4.

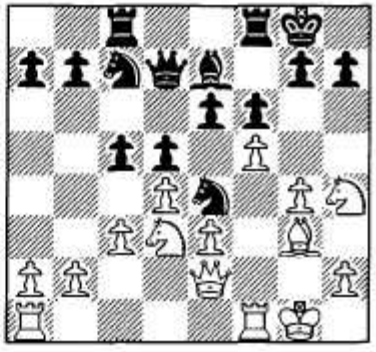
14...f6 15 ♘d3 ♗e7 16 f5!



Black is still better, but White has gained space and advanced an important pawn to a light square. This is the first of many f4-f5 pushes in this book that have an accompanying exclamation mark!

16...♕d7 17 ♘h4 ♘c7 18 ♗g3

A psychological move. Bent gambles that Petrosian will be unwilling to give up his beautiful knight on e4, even though that exchange, smashing White's kingside, is evidently good for Black. Correct is the simple 18...c4 19 ♘f2 (19 ♘f4 e5) 19...♘xg3 20 hxg3 ♗d6 and Black is better.



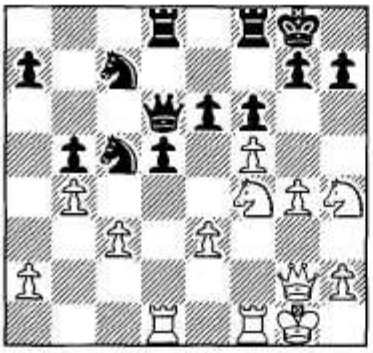
18...♗d6?

White gets away with it! This unforced bad bishop/good bishop trade solves all of White's problems. Larsen has fought his way back to equality, but now further psychological factors weigh in. Petrosian knew he was much better earlier; he doesn't want to admit that he threw his advantage away and, consequently, he keeps playing for a win when he should be trying to keep the game level. Meanwhile, Larsen grows stronger with each move.

19 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 20 ♖ad1 ♖ce8 21 dxc5 ♘xc5 22 ♘f4 b5 23 ♕g2 ♖d8?

Petrosian's sense of danger has deserted him. White has strong threats against the d-pawn because the coming fxe6 will undermine its support, and – even worse – the black queen is poorly placed, allowing a whole assortment of tactics based on its uncomfortable opposition to the white rook on d1. Black should run, not walk, toward equality with 23...♕b6!, when the veiled attack on e3 is enough to hold his position together. A likely variation is 24 fxe6 ♘5xe6 25 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 26 ♕xd5 ♕xe3+ 27 ♔h1 ♖d8 with an even game.

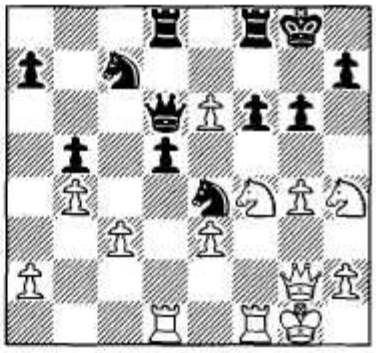
24 b4!



White is better. Larsen industriously undermines from every direction, and Petrosian's position collapses.

24...♘e4 25 fxe6 g6

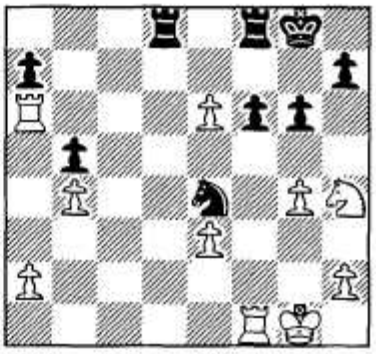
White threatened 26 ♘f5 and e6-e7, while 25...♘xe6 simply drops a pawn to 26 ♘xd5.



26 ♘xd5!

There is no stopping the Viking assault!

26...♘xd5 27 ♕xe4 ♘xc3 28 ♖xd6 ♘xe4 29 ♖a6!



Now that the dust has settled we see that White has an extra, passed pawn and the more active rooks. He also has the important possibility – and soon the reality – of an absolute seventh rank at-

tack. Black could try to stop this with passive defence, but after 29...♖a8 White could improve his position with 30 ♘f3 and ♘d4, with a win coming in due course.

29...♖d3!? 30 ♖xa7 ♖e8

30...♖xe3 would allow White to 'trampoline' his knight via g2 to f4, with decisive advantage.

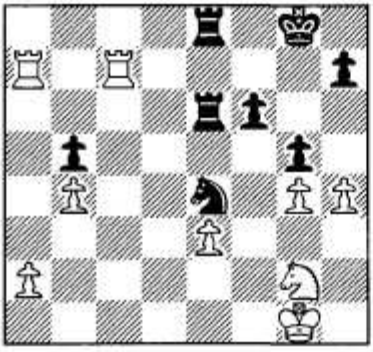
31 ♘g2 g5

31...♖xe6?? is ruled out by the knight fork on f4.

32 ♖c1 ♖d6?!

Black's last chance was 32...♘c3, although White's extra pawn should eventually tell after 33 ♔f2.

33 h4 ♖dxe6 34 ♖cc7



The contest is decided, although Petrosian plays on for a few more moves.

34...♘d6 35 ♖xh7 ♖c8 36 ♖hg7+ ♔h8 37 h5 ♘e8 38 ♖gf7 ♘d6 39 ♖h7+ ♔g8 40 h6 ♘e8 41 ♖hf7 1-0

This is not a good example of Bird's Opening, but it is a *great* example of Bent Larsen's ingenious, resourceful play!

To set the stage for the next game let us consider the circumstances. It was played in the final round of the Amsterdam Interzonal in 1964, with Spassky leading Larsen by a full point. Only a win could give Larsen a share of first place – and he chose the Bird! This time the opening worked perfectly; White was definitely better by move 11. Larsen attacked with all his forces, and despite Spassky's heroic defence, the Dane finally won a rook and pawn ending on move 68.

Game 5

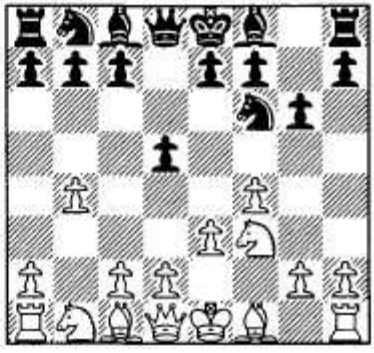
Larsen-Spassky

Amsterdam Interzonal 1964

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 e3 g6

Very popular. The opening is now a reversed Dutch, but the extra move for White allows for unusual possibilities.

4 b4!?

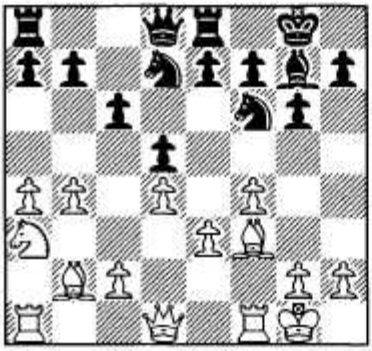


As Larsen says, the Bird is not so one-sided that White must only play on the kingside!

To which I would add that one of the best ways to prepare a kingside attack is to divert your opponent's forces to the queenside. The specific positional idea of interjecting this orang-utan leap is to prevent Black from playing ...c7-c5 and

...d5-d4, which is a key anti-fianchetto line that I mentioned in the notes to Lasker-Bauer (Game 3). For example, if White plays the quiet 4 b3 ♗g7 5 ♗b2 0-0 6 ♗e2 c5 7 0-0 ♘c6 Black is already menacing 8...d4 – more on this in Chapter 2. It is also important to note that Black can prevent either kind of queenside fianchetto with 2...g6 (instead of ...♘f6, blocking the diagonal) but, again, more later!

4...♗g7 5 ♗b2 0-0 6 ♗e2 ♗g4 7 0-0 c6 8 a4 ♘bd7 9 ♘a3 ♗xf3 10 ♗xf3 ♖e8 11 d4!?

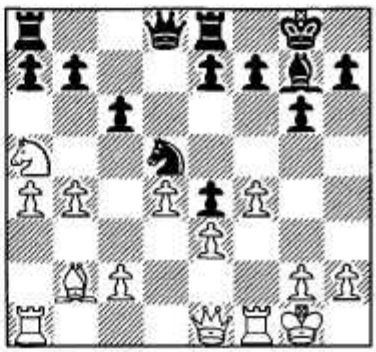


Larsen again goes for the Stonewall, but this time with much more positional justification as he still has his good bishop watching over e4 (for at least one more move) so Black can't settle a knight there, while ...e7-e5 is prevented. However, in the long term, White does have two holes in his position (c4 and e4), and Black has some chances to equalize now with 11...a5 12 b5 (12 c3 ♘b6) 12...cxb5 13 axb5 ♕c7 with the idea of ...♘b6 and ...♖ac8. Black has play in this variation, while White's queen's bishop is still obstructed by its own pawn. I think White's best is the more hypermodern 11 c4!, chipping away at Black's centre with both the f-pawn and c-pawn, while simultaneously working to open more lines for the two bishops. After 11 c4 I don't see any way for Black to equalize. Interestingly enough, Larsen had employed this idea in an earlier Bird-Orang-utan (Larsen-Dely, Game 16) and scored a smooth win – maybe he just wanted some variety.

11...♘e4?!

After this White loses both his weaknesses (a black pawn occupies e4) and the c4-square is also cleared for the coming knight and pawn attack. Now Bent takes the initiative between his teeth and never relinquishes it.

12 ♗xe4 dxe4 13 ♘c4 ♘b6 14 ♘a5 ♘d5 15 ♕e1!

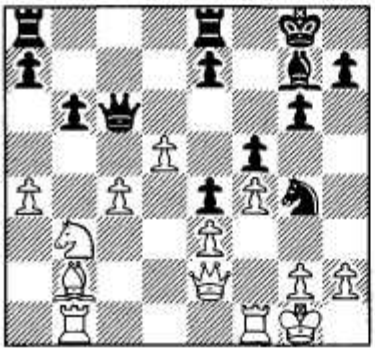


Beautiful! The influence of White's queen is felt from a5 to h4 – White begins a full board attack.

15...♕d7 16 c4 ♘f6 17 b5 ♕c7 18 ♖b1 ♘g4

Although White's advantage is clear, Spassky does not lose heart and begins an heroic defence that almost succeeds.

19 bxc6 b6 20 ♕e2 f5 21 ♘b3 ♕xc6 22 d5!

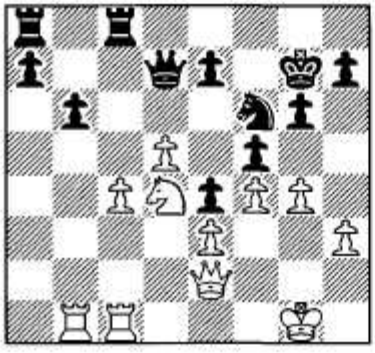


Sacrificing a pawn, Larsen turns his attention to the black king.

22...♕xa4 23 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 24 ♘d4

The total bind on e6 would have quickly accounted for a lesser master, but Boris hangs tough.

24...♖ec8 25 h3 ♘f6 26 ♖fc1 ♕d7 27 g4

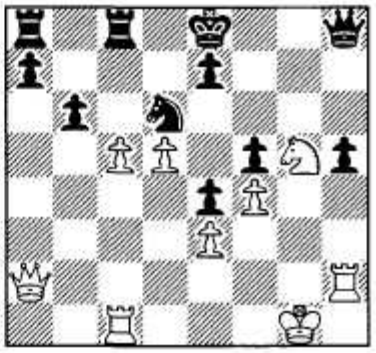


This audacious advance is possible because in the event of 27...fg4?! White has the zwischenzug 28 ♘e6+ when Black's structure collapses.

27...♔f7 28 g5 ♘e8 29 ♕a2 ♘d6 30 h4 ♕e8 31 ♘e6 ♕h8 32 h5 h6!

A great defensive try, as quiet play leads to a debacle on the h-file.

33 ♖b2 gxh5 34 ♖h2 hxg5 35 ♘xg5+ ♔e8 36 c5!

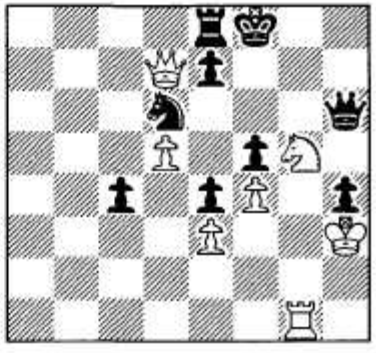


Opening all lines for attack, Tal fashion.

36...♖xc5 37 ♖xc5 bxc5 38 ♕a4+ ♔f8 39 ♖g2 ♖e8 40 ♕d7

For the moment White is three pawns down, but the black king is caught in a box and threatened on all sides. Note that Larsen does not rush to win the queen with ♘e6+ and ♖g7+, as Black might even be better with rook, knight and pawns for the queen.

40...♕h6 41 ♕xa7 ♕h8 42 ♕d7 ♕h6 43 ♘e6+ ♔f7 44 ♘g5+ ♔f8 45 ♔h2 h4 46 ♘e6+ ♔f7 47 ♘g5+ ♔f8 48 ♔h3 c4 49 ♘e6+ ♔f7 50 ♘g5+ ♔f8 51 ♖g1



'A pure waiting move, to lure the black pawn to the sixth rank' – Larsen. Over the last dozen moves the question is if Black has actually set up a drawing fortress, or if White can break through in some way. Larsen now finds a neat trick, but in view of Spassky's sterling defence, it's still not clear that he should win.

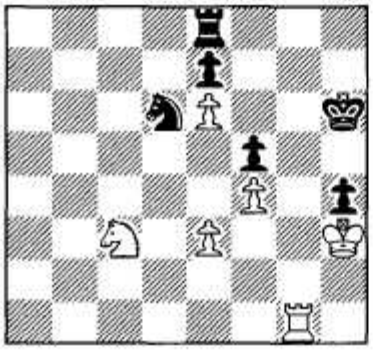
51...c3 52 ♕e6! ♕xe6

Note that Black can't avoid the exchange of queens, as 52...♕h8 allows the beautiful 53 ♕f7+!! ♘xf7 54 ♘e6 mate, and 52...♕g7 allows the killing 53 ♕e5!, again with a deadly knight check coming on e6.

53 dxe6 ♔g7

Forced in view of the mate threat, but now White recovers his material with an endgame advantage.

54 ♘xe4+ ♔h6 55 ♘xc3



Material is now even, but every black pawn is weak; consider White's possibilities of ♔xh4, ♖g5, and ♘d5. Still under great pressure, Spassky finally makes a mistake, and loses quickly. 55...♖d8 should draw according to Larsen and Kasparov, but even then Black would have a difficult defence after 56 ♖d1.

55...♘e4? 56 ♘xe4 fxe4 57 ♔xh4

The rook ending is lost as the black king is cut off from defence of his e-pawns.

57...♖a8 58 f5 ♖a2 59 ♖g8 ♖f2 60 ♖f8

Black resigns in view of such variations as 60...♔g7 61 ♖f7+ ♔g8 62 ♔g5 ♖f3 63 ♖xe7 ♖xe3 64 f6 ♖g3+ 65 ♔f4 ♖f3+ 66 ♔e5 e3 67 ♖g7+ ♔f8 68 e7+ and queens.

This is simply a great game, a fantastic struggle, and a worthy win for Larsen which also happens to show the flexibility and variety of the Bird!

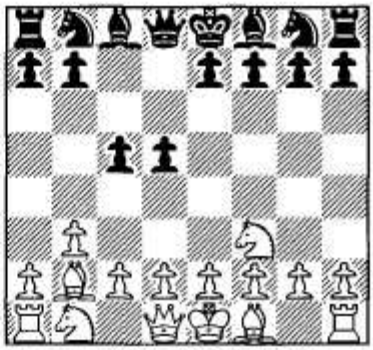
Bobby Fischer played the Bird only once in a serious game (and even then he reached the opening by transposition) but he did beat fellow world champion Vassily Smyslov with 1 f4 in a blitz game! Here is a smooth Fischer win – if one disregards one bump in the opening!

Game 6

Fischer-Mecking

Palma de Mallorca Interzonal 1970

1 b3 d5 2 ♗b2 c5 3 ♘f3?!



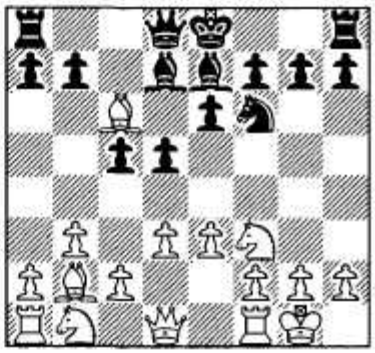
A well known opening mistake, but apparently not known by the players at the time of the game. White should play 3 e3 in order to avoid being overwhelmed in the centre, the idea to meet 3...f6 with 4 d4 with a good game. But after Bobby's move Black gets at least equality with the stifling 3...f6, when normal moves merely allow Black to form a powerful pawn centre, for example 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♕xd4 e5 6 ♕d2 ♘c6 7 e3 ♗b4 8 c3 ♗a5, Barcza-Benko, Hungary 1946 'and White's position was silly' (Byron Jacobs & Jonathan Tait in *Nimzo-Larsen Attack*). Fischer obviously discovered this after his game; amusingly enough, just a year later he was on the black side versus Petrosian, and the former world champion made the exact same mistake! Unwilling to let him off lightly, as Mecking had done with him, Bobby ruthlessly played 3...f6! 4 c4 d4 5 d3 e5 6 e3 ♘e7 7 ♗e2 ♘ec6 8 ♘bd2 ♗e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 e4 a6 11 ♘e1 b5 12 ♗g4 ♗xg4 13 ♕xg4 ♕c8! 14 ♕e2 ♘d7 15 ♘c2 ♖b8 and Black had all the play while White was cramped with a worthless queen's bishop – Fischer went on to win in fine style. Probably the only way White can get activity after 3...f6 is to try Keene's gambit 4 e4!? dxe4 5 ♘h4 ♘h6, but while White has practical chances I have my doubts that this is worth a pawn.

3...♘c6

Natural, but not best, as mentioned above.

4 e3 ♘f6 5 ♗b5 ♗d7 6 0-0 e6 7 d3 ♗e7 8 ♗xc6

White accentuates his control of the dark squares.



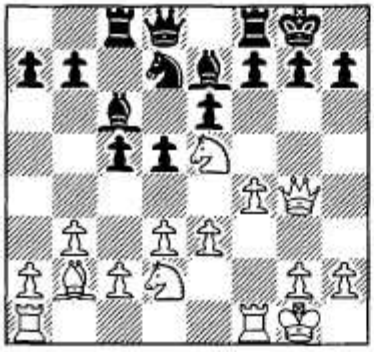
8...♗xc6 9 ♘e5 ♖c8 10 ♘d2 0-0 11 f4

The Bird finally appears! The same position can easily be reached by playing 1 f4, for example Taylor-Salinas, Santa Monica 2003 (Game 17), began 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 c5 3 e3 ♘c6 4 ♗b5 ♗d7 5 b3 ♘f6 6 ♗b2 e6 7 0-0 ♗e7 8 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 9 ♘e5 0-0 10 d3, and now 10...♖c8 11 ♘d2 would have been an exact transposition to Fischer-Mecking.

11...♘d7

This move is playable, but I think it's too passive and defensive to be best. Correct is the far more active 11...d4! (the thematic possibility Bauer missed, and what Larsen's Bird/Orang-utan is designed to prevent) when I don't see any problems for Black: White's dangerous queen's bishop is blocked, while Black's has become strong – but White can only exchange it for his excellently posted knight. In general I would say the chances are balanced, but White has to be careful, for example 12 e4 (better is 12 ♕e2, maintaining the tension) 12...♘d7 13 ♕g4 f5 14 ♕e2 ♘xe5 15 fxe5 b5 16 exf5 exf5 17 ♘f3 ♕b6 and Black was already clearly better in Epstein-Belaja, St. Petersburg 2001.

12 ♕g4



White takes advantage of the knight's abdication to establish a smooth attacking game. The immediate threat is the decisive 13 ♘xc6, while 12...f5? would be killed by 13 ♕xg7+! ♔xg7 14 ♘xc6+ ♗f6 15 ♘xd8.

12...♘xe5 13 ♗xe5 ♗f6 14 ♖f3

This blunt attack is quite good, but also possible is the more subtle 14 ♘f3 (Szekely-Giaidzi, Athens 1992), keeping a solid grip on e5.

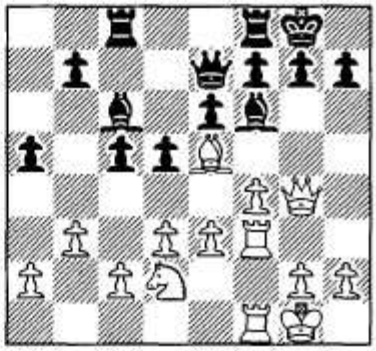
14...♕e7?

White is bringing every piece to a kingside attack, and Black thinks he has time for this? No! Jacobs and Tait believe Black can hold with 14...♗xe5 15 fxe5 ♕c7 16 ♕h5 ♗e8 and this may be true, but I try to avoid such pure defensive formations. I think the best counter for Black is the hitherto untried 14...c4!?, sacrificing a pawn for activity, for example 14...c4 15 ♖g3 g6 (15...cxd3? 16 ♕xg7+! ♗xg7 17 ♖xg7+ ♔h8 18 ♖xf7+ ♔g8 19 ♖g7+ ♔h8 20 ♖g6+ wins) 16 dxc4 ♗xe5 17 fxe5 dxc4 18 ♘xc4 f5 19 ♕d4 ♗d5 and Black's active bishop and pressure on the c-file offer reasonable play for the pawn.

15 ♖af1

Bobby calmly builds up.

15...a5



And Mecking nonchalantly advances an irrelevant pawn!

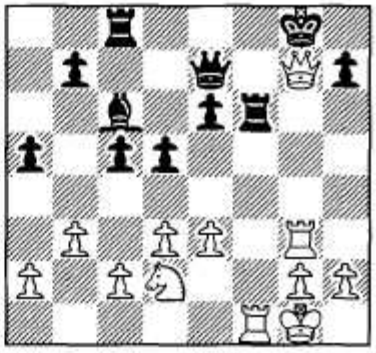
16 ♖g3

White threatens 17 ♕xg7+! and utter demolition – this finally caught Mecking's attention! In fact his defensive choice loses material, but the alternative 16...g6 does not inspire confidence as White will have a ready made attack on the weak dark squares, which will soon be bereft of their protecting bishop.

16...♗xe5 17 fxe5 f5

If 17...g6 18 ♖f6 with a deadly bind.

18 exf6 ♖xf6 19 ♕xg7+!



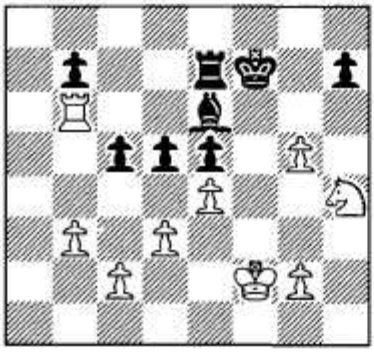
19...♕xg7 20 ♖xf6

Fischer picks up a clean pawn and retains the superior minor piece. He finishes the game with exemplary technique.

20...♕xg3 21 hxg3 ♖e8 22 g4

As will be seen, White can eventually trade off his doubled pawn.

22...a4 23 ♘f3 axb3 24 axb3 ♔g7 25 g5 e5 26 ♘h4 ♗d7 27 ♖d6 ♗e6 28 ♔f2 ♔f7 29 ♖b6 e7 30 e4!



Fixing Black's weaknesses.

30...dxe4 31 dxe4 c4 32 b4 ♗g4 33 ♔e3 ♖d7 34 g6+

Not only correcting White's pawn structure, this blow also leads to the win of further material.

34...♔f8 35 gxh7 ♖xh7 36 ♘g6+ ♔e8 37 ♘xe5 ♗c8 38 ♘xc4 ♔d8 39 ♘d6 ♖g7 40 ♔f2 ♔c7 41 ♘xc8 ♔xc8 42 ♖d6 1-0

World champion Vladimir Kramnik is well known for his solid – some would say boring – style, but that does not mean he cannot play the Bird! Here he fearlessly snatches a pawn in the opening, unconcerned about his ostensibly weak king and that 'scary' check on h4!

Game 7

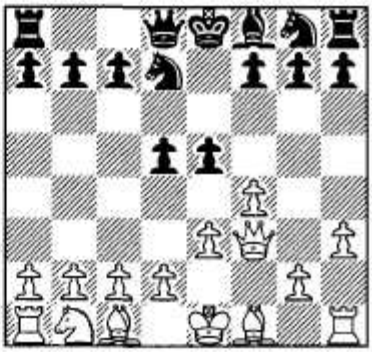
Kramnik-Oratovsky

USSR 1990

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♗g4 3 e3 ♘d7 4 h3

4 ♗e2 ♘gf6 5 0-0 transposes to Larsen-Smailbegovic, Game 19.

4...♗xf3 5 ♕xf3 e5



Black offers a pawn (5...♘gf6 6 g4!? is H.Danielsen-T.Luther, Game 22). When I reached this position (not knowing the Kramnik game at the time) in T.Taylor-J.Banawa, Los Angeles 2005 (don't be confused by the other Banawa reference – my opponent and I contested two Birds in the space of a few months, White emerging with a perfect 2-0) I was quite concerned about the queen check on h4, and so played the quieter 6 ♘c3, but after 6...c6 7 b3 ♗d6 8 ♗b2 ♕c7 9 0-0-0 0-0-0 Black had equalized.

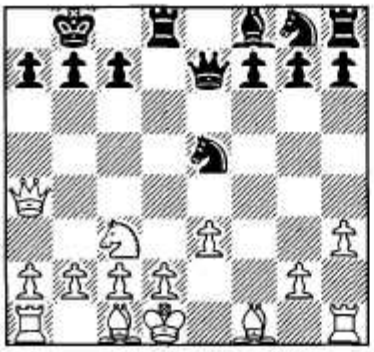
6 ♕xd5

Fearless! Kramnik evidently agrees with Steinitz that a pawn is worth some trouble!

6...♕h4+ 7 ♔d1 0-0-0

Neither 7...c6 8 ♕f3 nor 7...exf4 8 ♕xb7 helps Black.

8 fxe5 ♕e7 9 ♕a5 ♔b8 10 ♘c3 ♘xe5 11 ♕a4!



Preparing d2-d3, which if played now would lose a crucial pawn to 11...♘c4.

11...h5 12 d3

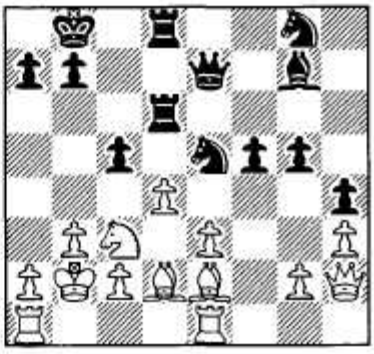
The position reached is similar to many lines of the From's Gambit. The open lines give Black attacking chances but, at the same time, White's centre pawns shield his king. However, unlike the From's, White has moved his king and so can't castle. From a computer point of view, Black may not have quite enough for the pawn here, but in a practical game his attack is very dangerous – as will be seen, one small error from White allows a raging attack!

12...♖h6 13 ♗d2 ♖b6 14 b3?!

And this is it! Kramnik forgets what Steinitz said about moving pawns in front of the king! Now Black generates dangerous threats on the long diagonal. Correct is 14 ♔c1, when White may be able to gradually disentangle without giving Black a point of attack.

14...g6 15 ♕f4 ♗g7 16 ♗e2 h4 17 ♖e1 ♖c6 18 d4 ♖cd6 19 ♔c1 g5 20 ♕h2 f5 21 ♔b2 c5!

The long diagonal begins to crack. Black's last few moves were very good.



22 ♘b5 a6!

White is given no time to patch up the diagonal as he could after 22...♖6d7? 23 ♗c3.

23 ♘xd6 ♕xd6

Black threatens ...♘c4+!, and White is in great danger. After 24 ♔b1 cxd4 25 ♖d1 (25 exd4 ♕xd4 26 ♗xg5 ♔a8! and Black has a winning attack) 25...dxe3! 26 ♗xe3 ♕xd1+ 27 ♗xd1 ♖xd1+ 28 ♗c1 f4 Black's attack is worth more than the material sacrificed, especially since White is in virtual zugzwang and his queen has no function. The best defence is 24 ♕g1!, returning material, for example 24...cxd4 25 exd4 ♘c4+ (25...♘f3 26 ♗xf3 ♗xd4+ 27 ♕xd4 ♕xd4+ 28 ♗c3 ♕c5 29 ♖e5 ♕c8 30 ♖ae1 is also fine for White thanks to the excellent bishop pair) 26 ♗xc4 ♗xd4+ 27 ♕xd4 ♕xd4+ 28 ♗c3 with an approximately equal but double-edged position. But now White is in trouble!

24 ♖h1 cxd4 25 ♖ad1

Or 25 exd4 ♕xd4+ 26 ♗c3 ♕c3 27 ♖ad1 ♖c8 28 ♖d3 ♕c5 29 ♔b1 f4 and Black recovers his material with a powerful attack

25...♔a8

Both players lose their way in this complex position. Black should attack immediately with 25...d3! 26 ♗c3 (forced in view of 26 cxd3 ♘f3) 26...♖c8 and a clear advantage, as there is no reasonable defence to ...♖c3.

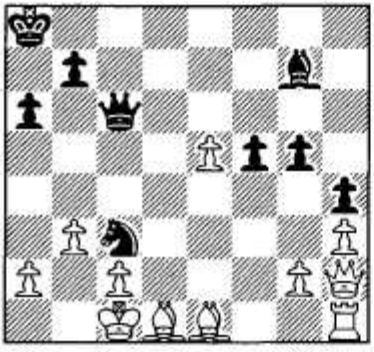
26 ♔b1 ♘f6 27 exd4 ♘e4

27...♕xd4 loses to 28 ♗xg5+ as there are no tricks on the long diagonal.

28 ♗e1?!

Both players were probably in time trouble as a result of the fantastically complicated struggle – White should shore up the long diagonal with 28 c3, when Black hardly has enough for the material.

28...♕c6 29 dxe5 ♖xd1+ 30 ♗xd1 ♘c3+ 31 ♔c1



31...♘xa2+?

After his heroic sacrificial attack it is a pity Oratovsky missed 31...♕c5!, when Black should draw a rook down! White has to play 32 ♗xc3 since 32 g4 ♗xe5 33 ♕g2 ♗f4+ is decisive and 32 ♕g1 ♘xa2+ 33 ♔d2 ♕d5+ 34 ♔e2 ♗xe5 gives Black a terrible attack. Then 32...♕xc3 33 ♕g1 ♗xe5 34 ♗f3 ♗f4+ 35 ♔b1 ♗e5 draws – but perhaps future world champions are always lucky.

32 ♔b2 ♕c5

There is no good square for the queen – 32...♕d5 33 ♔xa2 ♗xe5 34 ♗f3 ♕d4 35 c3 ♕c5 36 ♕g1 and White wins, while in the case of 32...♕b5 33 ♔xa2 ♗xe5 34 ♕g1 there is no more attack.

33 ♔xa2 ♗xe5 34 ♕g1 ♗d4 35 ♕f1 1-0

White forces resignation without a single piece off the back rank!

In conclusion, let me just state a simple fact: the Bird's Opening has been used as a winning weapon by world champions and it has been used to defeat world champions. You can use the Bird to surprise a friend in a club match, or you can go after a GM with it... So let's crunch some variations!

PART ONE

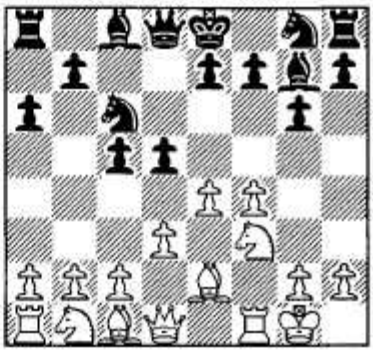
1 f4 d5
Reversed Dutch Systems

As I mentioned in the Introduction, 1 f4 d5 is the main line of the Bird. Then there usually comes 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 or 2...g6, while the third move is up in the air! I had a difficult time deciding which line should lead the pack in the Reversed Dutch. When I first played the Bird I liked the Leningrad system with the king's fianchetto (I used this to defeat GM Rogoff). This line is championed by GM Henrik Danielsen, who regularly plays the Bird's, and this is certainly an argument in its favour. Then there are the queen's fianchetto systems, which have given Bird players numerous high profile wins, like Fischer-Mecking and Lasker-Bauer (Games 3 and 6 respectively). However, I could not give this first place as the line can't be forced – Black can play 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6. Finally, I decided on the Classical, for two reasons: 1. I believe this line gives White excellent chances for an opening advantage, and 2. That's my favourite line right now! Chapter 2 will feature queen's Fianchetto systems, both with b2-b3 and b2-b4. Chapter 3 deals with the 'recipe' line, which is often touted as an all purpose anti-Bird, Black playing an early ...♗g4 and aiming to launch the e-pawn. Chapter 4 is the reversed Leningrad system, with the White opting for a kingside fianchetto. Chapter 5 is the Antoshin variation, where White tries to build a strong centre with d2-d3, c2-c3, ♕c2 and then e2-e4. Finally, Chapter 6 features the Stonewall.

CHAPTER ONE

The Classical Bird

The basic set-up of this variation is as follows: 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e3 ♗g7 4 ♗e2 ♘f6 5 0-0 0-0 6 d3 c5. The first merit of this line for White is that after 1...d5 Black has virtually no way to prevent White from setting up a Classical System; the opposition can try other moves besides what is given above (in fact, the games in this chapter feature various small deviations from Black), but White can calmly play in the same way. White's main idea is simple – to advance the e-pawn to e4. If White achieves this the two pawns lined up at f4 and e4 dominate the centre, facilitate kingside attacking chances and secure an advantage. Black can try to counter this in some positions by advancing with ...d5-d4, when White's e-pawn is unable to slip by. Another possibility is for Black to play ...e7-e5 himself. Meanwhile, White is not limited to a single idea: he can use the advanced f-pawn as a harbinger of a kingside attack, either through the battering ram of f4-f5 (see Game 11, Taylor-Martinez) or as a support for an attacking knight on e5. Another idea is the rook lift (♖f3-g3 or h3) and the queen manoeuvre ♕e1-h4. White is not limited to the kingside and centre – notice how in Taylor-Ivanov, Game 14, White begins play on the queenside, and only later switches his aim to Black's king. However, the fundamental battle will be over the e4-square. Remember that in this variation White basically aims to achieve this type of ideal Bird centre:



This position could have occurred in Taylor-Shabalov, after my recommended

7 e4. By accomplishing the e3-e4 advance White guarantees at least a small advantage.

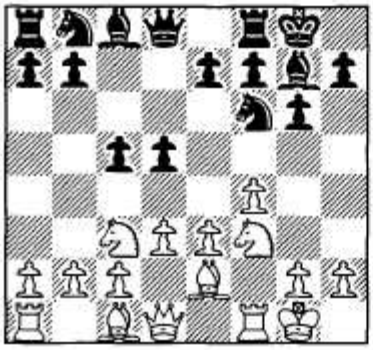
Returning to our basic position, after 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e3 ♗g7 4 ♗e2 ♘f6 5 0-0 0-0 6 d3 c5, what is White's best move? The answer is... I don't know! There have been so few games played with this position, and so few of them featuring strong players on both sides, that best play is absolutely up for grabs. However, I do have an opinion, and this is that best is 7 ♘c3, so we begin with that line.

Game 8

KanWai Shui-D.Browning

Haifa Olympiad 1976

1 f4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 d3 d5 4 e3 ♗g7 5 ♗e2 0-0 6 0-0 c5 7 ♘c3



A very direct move. White simply wants to push his pawn to e4, and this is quite difficult to prevent. Note that this plan is correct only with a black knight on f6 (which invites attack by the advancing e-pawn). If Black has not committed this knight and can still play ...e7-e6 and ...♘e7 (as in Game 2, Taylor-Shabalov), then a knight on c3 might prove to be out of play. White's alternatives are 7 ♕e1 (by far the most popular, though I have my doubts as to whether it is best), which is seen in Games 9-13, and 7 a4 (seen in the notes to Game 14). And who knows, there may be a new move out there that you can find!

7...d4

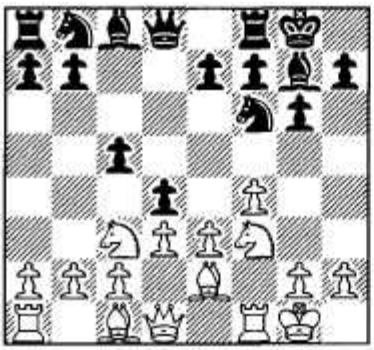
If Black wants to prevent a quick e3-e4 this is the only try, as 7...♗f5 does not help after the simple 8 ♘h4 (8 ♘e5, with the idea of ♗f3 and e3-e4, also looks good for White) 8...♗d7 9 e4 and White is better. A major alternative is for Black to simply develop and let White achieve his goal – but then hit the c3-knight, which is no longer able to go to e4 as in the game. After 7...♘c6 there is a split – White can stick with the program and play 8 e4 or challenge the newly developed black knight with 8 ♘e5.

a) 8 e4 d4 (8...dxe4 9 dxe4 gives White the excellent structure he wants; White's advantage persists even after the queen exchange – 9...♕xd1 10 ♖xd1 e5 11 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 12 fxe5 ♘g4 13 ♗f4 ♘xe5 14 ♘b5 ♗g4 15 ♗xg4 ♘xg4 16 h3 ♘e5 and now 17 ♘d6 followed by 18 ♖d5 would have given White a clear advantage in Kan-Vaglio Munoz, Haifa 1976) 9 ♘a4 (9 ♘b1 is also possible, following up with ♘d2-c4) 9...♘d7 10 c4 a6 (10...dxc3 11 ♘xc3 [11 bxc3? b5] 11...♘d4 12 e5 ♘b8 13 ♘xd4 ♕xd4+ 14 ♔h1 ♘c6 15 ♗f3 ♗f5 16 ♖e1 ♕xd3 17 ♗e3 and White has excellent compensation for the pawn in view of the active bishops) 11 b3 b5 12 ♘b2 with a favourable reversed King's Indian type of

position, but with at least two extra tempi. Compare B.Larsen-S.Gligoric, Dallas 1957, which reached an analogous position after 1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 g3 g6 3 ♗g2 ♗g7 4 0-0 0-0 5 c4 d6 6 d4 c5 7 ♘c3 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘a5 9 ♘d2 e5 10 a3 b6 11 b4 ♘b7 12 ♘b3 ♘e8 13 e4 f5. In the Bird variation White did not lose time repositioning his knight to advance the f-pawn, and so stands excellently (by the way, even playing catch-up, Gligoric won the above mentioned game).

b) 8 ♘e5 (a typical Dutch move, recommended by IM Simon Williams and here made even stronger by the extra tempo) 8...♕c7 (8...♘xe5 9 fxe5 ♘d7 10 ♘xd5 shows the worth of that tempo – in the Dutch Black can't take the d pawn, but here this is good for White, as after 10...♘xe5 11 e4 White has a slight but definite advantage due to his central knight and the open f-file) 9 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 (if Black voluntarily doubles his pawns with 9...bxc6 White can get a good advantage with 10 e4) 10 ♗f3 ♖d8 11 ♕e2 and White achieves e3-e4 with the edge typical for this variation.

So it seems that the text is the most testing move.



8 ♘e4 ♘xe4

Now White gets the structure he wants and maintains a persistent edge, as will be seen. Evidently critical is the unexplored 8...♘d5. Not being able to find any games with this line, I took on Fritz 8 at blitz to see what the machine could show me. The following entertaining game ensued: 9 ♘xc5 ♘xe3 10 ♗xe3 dxe3 11 d4 ♕c7 (11...b6 12 ♘d3 ♗xd4 13 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 14 c3 ♕c4 15 ♘b4 ♕c5 16 ♕d5 ♕xd5 17 ♘xd5 ♘c6 18 ♗b5 ♘d8 19 ♘xe7+ ♔g7 20 ♘d5 and White is practically winning) 12 c3 ♕xf4 13 ♘e5 ♕g5 (13...♕h6 is a better try, but the machine does not 'see' my coming sac) 14 ♘xf7! (as for this human, I didn't calculate a thing, but sacrificed on Bird instinct – the computer only now saw that this was sound, and declined!) 14...♕d5 (14...♖xf7 15 ♕b3 ♗f6 [15...e6 16 ♖xf7 ♔xf7 17 ♖f1+ and everything loses: 17...♗f6 18 ♘e4, 17...♔g8 18 ♘xe6 ♕e7 19 ♘g5+ ♗e6 20 ♘xe6 and 17...♔e7 18 ♘xb7 ♕d5 19 ♕a3+ ♔e8 20 ♘d6+ ♔d8 21 ♘xc8 ♔xc8 22 ♗f3 when it's all over] 16 ♗c4 e2 [16...e6 17 ♘xe6] 17 ♗xf7+ ♔g7 18 ♖fe1 ♕e3+ 19 ♔h1 ♗h4 20 ♗e8 ♗xe1 [20...e6 21 ♕c2 destroys Black's only counterplay – the passed pawn] 21 ♕f7+ ♔h6 22 ♕f8+ ♔g5 23 ♖xe1 b6 24 ♘b3 ♗b7 25 ♕f7 ♘a6 26 ♗b5 again wins the pawn and the game) 15 b3 e6 16 ♗c4 e2 17 ♕xe2 ♗xd4+ 18 cxd4 ♕xd4+ 19 ♔h1 ♕xc5 20 ♗xe6 ♗xe6 21 ♕xe6 ♘c6 22 ♕f6 ♖xf7 23 ♕xf7+ ♔h8 24 ♖ae1 ♖d8 25 ♕xb7 ♘e5 26 h3 ♔g8 27 ♕e4 ♖e8 28 ♖c1 ♕b5 29 ♖fe1 ♖f8 30 ♖c7 ♘f7 31 ♕d4 a6 32 ♖ee7 ♕f1+ 33 ♔h2 a5 34 ♕e4 ♕f6 35 ♕f3 ♕xf3 36 gxf3 ♔g7 37

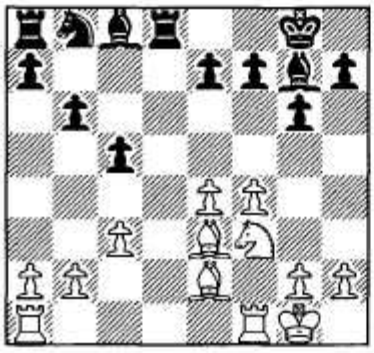
♖xf7+ ♖xf7 38 ♖xf7+ ♔xf7 39 a3 ♔e6 40 b4 axb4 41 axb4 ♔d5 42 ♔g3 h6 43 h4 ♔c4 44 ♔f4 ♔xb4 45 ♔e5 g5 46 hxg5 hxg5 47 ♔f5 ♔c5 48 ♔xg5 1-0, T.Taylor-Fritz 8, 5 minute game, Los Angeles 2005. Of course this cannot be taken seriously as the latest word in theory but it does help illustrate White's attacking possibilities.

Another alternative is 8...♘fd7 9 ♘g3 dxe3 10 c3 ♕c7 11 ♗xe3 with a good position for White that is similar to the Antoshin System (see Chapter 5). Finally, Black can play 8...♕b6, but then White carries out his plan with 9 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 10 e4 and maintains the familiar edge.

9 dxe4 dxe3

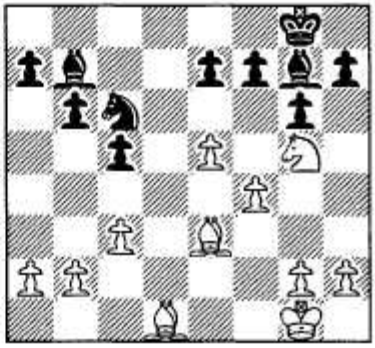
If Black keeps the queens on with 9...♕b6 White retains his small advantage with 10 exd4 cxd4 11 ♗d3 ♘c6 12 a3.

10 ♕xd8 ♖xd8 11 c3 b6 12 ♗xe3



The space advantage and superior development gives White a pull. The reader should remember this pawn structure, as it is nearly always advantageous for White, and often occurs in the Bird's. It is difficult to see where Black's pieces can go, or how Black can generate play. Generally speaking, White can win, while Black can only hope to draw.

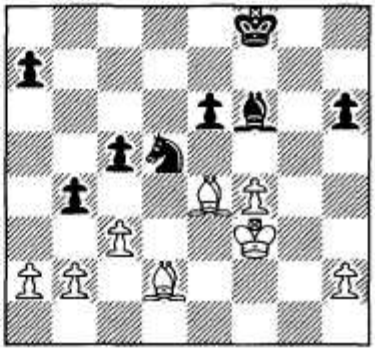
12...♗b7 13 e5 ♘c6 14 ♖ad1 ♖xd1 15 ♖xd1 ♖d8 16 ♘g5 ♖xd1+ 17 ♗xd1



17...h6 18 ♘h3 ♔f8 19 ♗c2 e6 20 ♘f2 ♘e7 21 ♘e4 ♗xe4

Black doesn't like the white knight heading for d6, but now must face the two bishops. Perhaps a better defence was 21...♘f5 22 ♗f2 h5.

22 ♗xe4 ♘d5 23 ♗d2 g5 24 g3 f6 25 exf6 ♗xf6 26 ♔g2 b5 27 ♔f3 gxf4 28 gxf4 b4

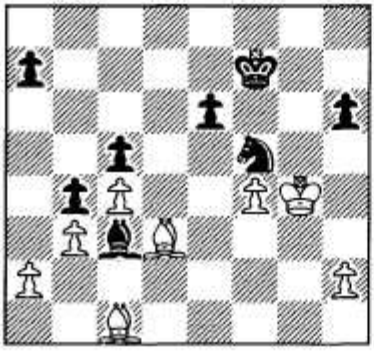


29 c4?

Closing the position gives Black serious drawing chances. White should be

opening lines for his bishops! Correct is 29 cxb4 ♘xb4 (29...cxb4 30 ♗xd5 exd5 31 ♗xb4+ ♔e8 32 ♗c3 is a winning bishop ending) 30 ♗e3 and the bishops rule, e.g. 30...♘xa2 31 ♗b1! ♘b4 32 ♗xc5+ ♗e7 33 ♗xa7 with a good extra pawn.

29...♘e7 30 b3 ♘f5 31 ♗d3 ♔f7 32 ♔g4 ♗c3 33 ♗c1



33...♔g6?

Having defended an inferior position for so long it is not surprising that Black finally blunders. It is difficult to see how White can improve his position if Black plays the accurate 33...♔f6 34 ♔h5 (34 ♗xf5 exf5+ 35 ♔h5 ♔g7 draws) 34...♔g7.

34 ♗e3

Decisive – White wins by pin!

34...♗d4 35 ♗xd4 cxd4 36 ♗xf5+ exf5+ 37 ♔f3 ♔f6 38 ♔e2 ♔e6 39 ♔d3 ♔d6 40 ♔xd4 h5 41 h4 a6 42 c5+ ♔c6 43 ♔c4 a5 44 ♔d4 ♔b5 45 ♔d5 a4 46 ♔d6 1-0

Game 9

T.Taylor-A.Shabalov

HB Global Minneapolis, May 2005

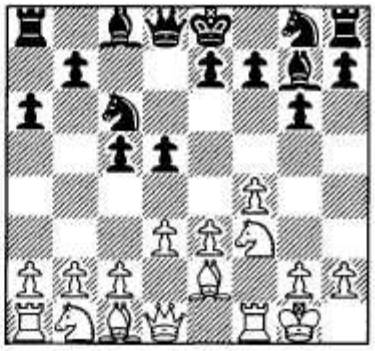
1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 c5 3 e3 a6

This is inaccurate. There is good reason for Black to avoid the pin of the queen's knight (see the next chapter, particularly Game 17, Taylor-Salinas), but there is no reason to lose a tempo in doing so. Black could reasonably play ...♘f6, ...g7-g6, ...♗g7, ...0-0 and only then play ...♘c6, much as White does versus the Dutch.

4 ♗e2 ♘c6

4...d4 5 e4 is good for White.

5 d3 g6 6 0-0 ♗g7

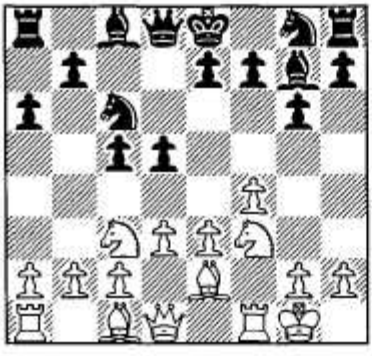


7 ♘c3?!

This move is neither necessary nor correct with no knight on f6. White should simply play 7 e4! before committing the knight. This gives White a small edge (as mentioned in the Introduction) due to greater control of the centre and decent attacking chances. It is important that c2-c3 is still an option for White. Furthermore, as Game 8 showed, there is no reason to fear a possible queen exchange, as White's advantage will persist in the queenless middlegame. After 7 e4 Black has no clear way to equality, e.g. 7...dxe4 (not 7...♘f6 8 e5 ♘d7 9 c3 f6 10 d4 with a big plus in space for White) 8 dxe4 ♕xd1 9 ♖xd1 ♘d4 10 ♘xd4

♗xd4+ 11 ♔f1 ♗g7 (11...e6? loses to 12 e5) 12 ♘d2 with the typical pull for White. If Black plays similarly to the game with 7...e6 White continues 8 ♘bd2 ♘ge7 9 c3 with a small but enduring edge.

I'm not sure why I made the inaccuracy in the game, since I had won a similar game before: 1 f4 g6 2 ♘f3 ♗g7 3 e3 d5 4 ♗e2 c5 5 0-0 ♘c6 6 d3 e6 7 ♕e1 ♘ge7 8 e4 (almost identical to Taylor-Shabalov, but Black has not wasted a tempo on 3...a6) 8...♘d4 9 ♗d1 c4 10 ♘bd2 cxd3 11 cxd3 0-0 12 e5 ♘ec6 13 ♘b3 (note how White is able to kick the knight out of d4, which I was unable to do in the present game) 13...♘xf3+ 14 ♗xf3 f6 15 d4 f5 16 ♗e3 b6 17 ♖c1 ♕d7 18 ♗e2 ♗b7 19 ♖f3 ♖ac8 20 ♖h3 ♖f7 21 ♗f2 ♕e8 22 ♗h4 ♖fc7 23 ♖hc3 ♗f8 24 a3 ♕f7 25 g4 ♘d8 26 ♖xc7 1-0 T.Taylor-Miralaie, Los Angeles County Open 2004. I suspect I was thinking of mating Shabalov, and did not want to exchange queens – but a comfortable plus in a queenless middlegame is nothing to sneeze at, while you will soon see that mate was not really on the agenda.



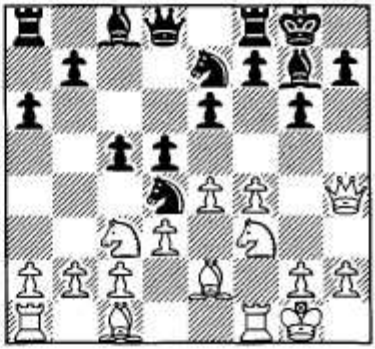
7...e6 8 e4 ♘ge7

Now Black has a solid centre, while the white knight is misplaced (there should be a pawn on this square, to support e4-e5 and then d3-d4, while also keeping the enemy knight out of d4).

9 ♕e1

Both 9 e5 and 9 ♘a4 can be answered effectively by 9...♘d4.

9...0-0 10 ♕h4 ♘d4



11 ♗d1?!

'The retreat of a minor piece to the back rank, where it obstructs the rooks, is admissible only in extreme cases' (Alekhine). I am including this game in the book for the instructive errors – after all, one must also know what *not* to play! Correct is the evident 11 ♘xd4, which should come out about equal. Black's best capture is 11...♗xd4+, but during the game I was afraid of 11...cxd4, opening the c-file, because I missed an important trick.

White can play 12 ♘d1 ♕c7 13 c4! which I didn't realize was possible! This sham sacrifice is based on the tactic 13...dxc3 14 bxc3 ♗xc3? 15 ♘xc3 ♕xc3 16 ♕xe7 ♕xa1 17 ♕xf8! and the surprising bishop discovery wins. Therefore Black must try 14...b5, but after the reply 15 ♗a3 ♖e8 16 e5 White is better

15 ♗a3 ♖e8 16 e5 White is better due to his control of the dark squares. Therefore, as mentioned, Black should answer 11 ♘xd4 with 11...♗xd4+, when play could continue 12 ♔h1 ♘c6 13 ♕g3 (the only logical move, keeping the queens on the board in order to balance Black's queenside play – the coming ...b7-b5 – with kingside attacking chances) 13...b5 14 a3 ♗g7. Now a typical but very sharp variation is 15 exd5 exd5 16 ♗f3 ♘d4 17 ♗xd5 ♘xc2 18 f5! ♘xa1 19 ♗g5 with a wildly complicated, double-edged game – the important thing from White's point of view is that he achieved the key f4-f5 advance, and all the pieces are active.

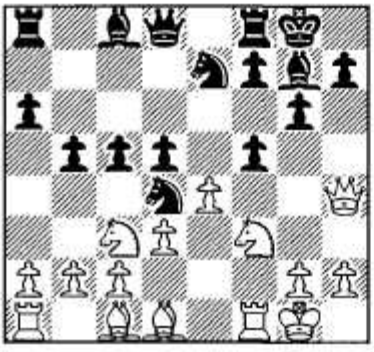
11...b5

Two mistakes (7 ♘c3 and 11 ♗d1) are too many – even with White. Black is already better, with his strong knight and expansive queenside play.

12 f5!?

White may as well mix it up, for 12 ♘xd4 is too late: 12...cxd4 13 ♘e2 dxe4 14 dxe4 ♗b7 and Black's queen's bishop comes strongly into the game.

12...exf5

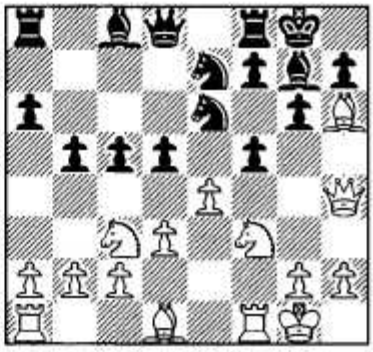


13 ♗h6

An amusing variation – for Black! – would be 13 ♘g5 h6 14 ♘h3 b4 15 ♗xh6 bxc3 16 ♘g5 cxb2 17 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 18 ♕h7+ ♔f6 and the king escapes.

13...♘e6!

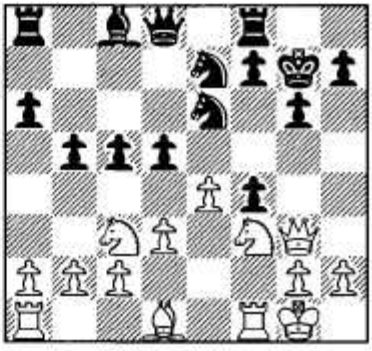
A great defensive move, avoiding all tricks with ♘g5.



14 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 15 ♕g3

Also poor is 15 exd5 ♘xd5 16 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 17 ♖e1 ♗b7 etc.

15...f4



White is unable to generate King's Gambit type play with the king's bishop inactive – which means that Black is simply a pawn up.

16 ♕h4 h6 17 ♘e2 g5 18 ♕h5 dxe4 19 dxe4 ♗b7 20 g3 ♘g6 21 e5 c4!

Black's advantage is decisive

22 gxf4 ♘exf4 23 ♘xf4 ♘xf4 24 ♕g4 ♕b6+ 25 ♖f2 ♗c8 0-1

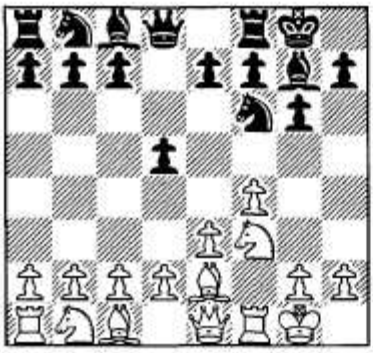
The most important lesson to learn from this game is that if you get a chance for a small but definite edge (7 e4) you should take it! By delaying for no good reason, and dreaming of an attack that simply wasn't there, White not only lost his edge but lost a full point! Note also that the development of White's knight to c3 is inaccurate if Black can fortify his centre with ...c7-e6 and ...♘e7, which leaves the white knight nowhere to go while its opposite number has free access to the d4-square.

Game 10

V.Smyslov-G.Ilivitzki

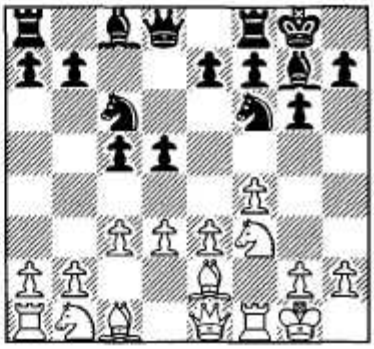
22nd USSR Ch., Moscow 1955

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e3 ♗g7 4 ♗e2 ♘f6 5 0-0 0-0 6 ♕e1



Usually White plays d2-d3 first, but that's just a transposition. The important question is 'Should White commit his queen so early?' Despite the fact that this queen manoeuvre is the most popular plan in the Classical Bird – and despite the fact that I have played it many times myself in the past – I must now conclude that the answer is 'No!'

6...c5 7 d3 ♘c6 8 c3



White contests the d4-square. For the more direct 8 ♕h4, see Larsen-Schmidt, Game 13.

8...♗g4

The rarely played 8...d4!? is definitely worth a try – by challenging both White's pawns Black forces something to open up. White has three reasonable replies:

a) 9 ♘e5 ♘xe5 10 fxe5 ♘g4 (10...♘d7 11 exd4 cxd4 12 cxd4 ♕b6 13 ♕f2 f6!?) 11 ♗xg4 ♗xg4 12 ♖f4 ♗e6 13 exd4 cxd4 14 ♖xd4 ♕b6 with good compensation for the pawn due to the two bishops and lead in development, for example 15 ♘d2 f6 16 ♔h1 fxe5 17 ♖b4 ♕a6.

b) 9 e4 dxc3 10 bxc3 (10 ♘xc3 ♘d4 is equal) 10...c4 and Black breaks up White's ungainly centre.

c) 9 cxd4 cxd4 10 e4 ♘g4 11 a3 ♕b6 and Black had annoying play and went on to win in A.Dimitrijevic-M.Sebag, Hengelo 2004.

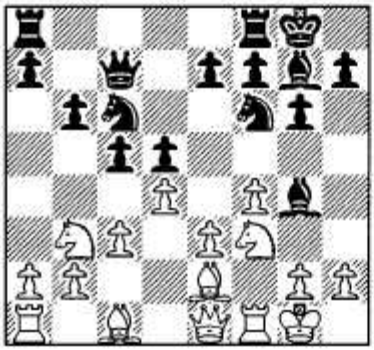
For 8...b6 and 8...♕c7 see Games 11

and 12 respectively.

9 ♘bd2

Or 9 ♘e5 ♗xe2 10 ♘xc6 bxc6 11 ♕xe2 ♕d6 12 c4 (12 e4 ♕e6 13 ♘d2 c4 14 e5 cxd3 15 ♕xd3 ♘d7 16 ♘b3 c5 is level) 12...♖ae8 13 ♘c3 e5 and Black's central play seems to balance the doubled pawns.

9...♕c7 10 ♘b3 b6 11 d4



11...cxd4?!

Freeing the e3-square for White's queen's bishop can't be right. Black can keep it equal with the simple 11...♕d6, or try for more with 11...c4 12 ♘bd2 b5 13 ♘e5 ♗xe2 14 ♕xe2 a5 15 e4 a4 16 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 17 e5 ♕e6, when White's space in the centre is balanced by his permanently bad bishop.

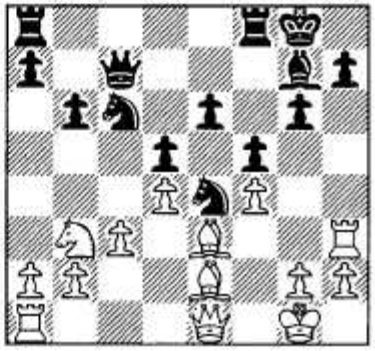
12 exd4 ♘e4

White easily meets a demonstration on the queenside: 12...a5 13 ♗e3 a4 14 ♘bd2 a3 15 b3 ♖fc8 16 ♖c1 with a pleasant edge and options of both c3-c4 and ♘e5. Notice that this harmonious development for White (♗e3, ♘d2) is only possible because of the mistaken 11...cxd4, which gave White just the extra square he needed.

13 ♗e3 ♗xf3?

This serves only to help White by giving him the bishop pair and activating the white rook. Correct is 13...f6 to play in the centre, with a possible follow-up being 14 ♕h4 ♗f5 15 g4 ♗d7 16 ♘fd2 ♘xd2 17 ♘xd2 e5 18 f5 ♖ae8 and it's still not clear that White has anything.

14 ♖xf3 f5 15 ♖h3 e6



But this is different. Black has no activity, while White has possibilities all over the board: the break c3-c4, the manoeuvre ♘d2-f3-e5, and ♕h4 with a direct attack. The problem, even for a world champion (actually Smyslov would get the title two years later), is with all these tempting continuations – which one should he go for first? Unexpectedly, the positional genius Smyslov fails to find the exact move order.

16 ♖c1

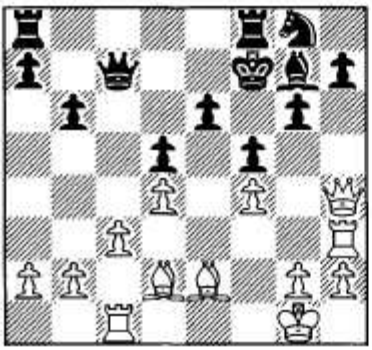
An inexact move – the queenside break is not yet critical, but the centre is. The precise move is 16 ♘d2! – Black can hardly let the white knight reach f3, where it eyes e5 and g5 and adds overwhelming power to White's kingside attack. Consequently Black must give up his best placed piece with 16...♘xd2 17 ♗xd2 ♘a5 18 ♖e3! (White doesn't allow

Black to consolidate with ...♘b7-d6-e4) 18...♖f6 19 ♗f3 ♕d6 20 b3, when it is impossible to believe Black will survive in view of White's numerous advantages (pressure on the e-file against Black's backward pawn, which can be augmented with ♕e2 and ♖e1, long diagonal pressure from the king's bishop and the ever looming break at c4). This would have been a typical Smyslov win, but now something else happens...

16...♘e7 17 ♕h4 ♔f7!

A great move. Black indirectly defends h7 and prepares ...♘g8-f6. Clearly, Smyslov missed this manoeuvre.

18 ♘d2 ♘xd2 19 ♗xd2 ♘g8



20 c4?!

White starts to slide. Smyslov is demonstrating the same symptoms that Petrosian showed against Larsen in Game 4. Both of these great world champions knew they had outplayed their opponents, and had close-to-winning positions. But when they slipped, and lost the advantage, they could not objectively recognize that and, rather optimistically, went to their doom! White should regroup with 20 ♗d3 ♘f6 21 ♗e3 with a perfectly fine position, but Smyslov doesn't want to admit that 16 ♖c1 was a mistake and instead tries to justify it.

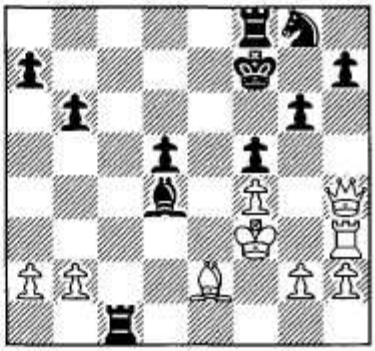
20...♖ac8!

Suddenly Black's play is inspired! Rather than capturing on d4 (which might be playable) he sets a trap, baiting his high ranked opponent's overconfidence.

21 cxd5?

White can't resist! The rapid retreat 21 ♗e3 ♘f6 22 ♕e1 dxc4 23 ♗xc4 ♕d6 leads to approximate equality.

21...♕xc1+ 22 ♗xc1 ♖xc1+ 23 ♔f2 ♗xd4+ 24 ♔f3 exd5



The trading has resulted in a clear advantage for Black. Despite White's material advantage a glance at the position shows the helplessness of White's major pieces.

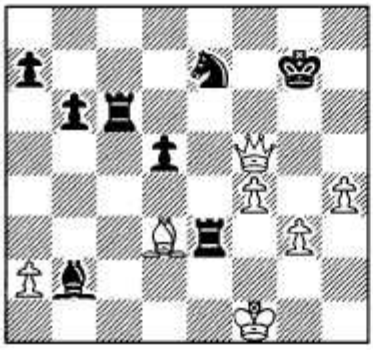
25 ♕xh7+ ♗g7 26 ♖g3 ♘e7 27 ♖xg6

Desperation, since after 27 ♖h3 ♖c2 28 b4 ♖xa2 29 ♔f2 ♖h8 Black reaches an ending a sound pawn up.

27...♘xg6 28 ♕h5 ♗xb2 29 ♗d3 ♔g7 30 g3

30 ♗xf5? ♖xf5.

30...♖c3 31 ♔e2 ♖c6 32 h4 ♖e8+ 33 ♔f1 ♖e3 34 ♕xf5 ♘e7



35 ♕h7+ ♔f8 36 g4 ♗g7 37 ♔f2 d4 38 g5 ♖c3 39 ♗e2 ♖c5 40 h5 ♖f5 41 h6 ♖xf4+ 42 ♔e1 ♗e5 43 ♔d1 0-1

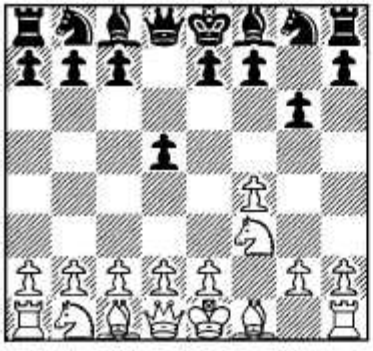
White resigned in view of 43...♖f7, when Black wins easily, e.g. 44 ♕c2 ♖f2 or 44 ♕b1 ♘d5. Notice that while Smyslov was much better in the early middle game, he got nothing out of the opening.

Game 11

T.Taylor-Martinez

Pacific Southwest Open (Rapidplay), 2002

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6



Remember that this move order is very important because Black prevents the immediate queenside fianchetto

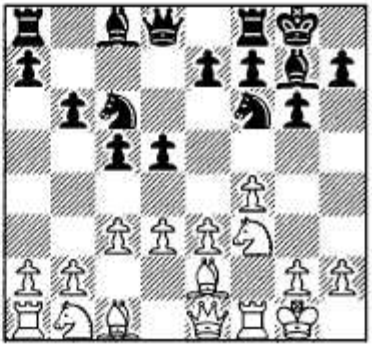
3 e3 ♗g7 4 ♗e2 c5 5 0-0 ♘f6 6 d3

6 ♘e5 0-0 7 b3 d4 is good for Black, so with this order it's best to avoid this fianchetto altogether.

6...0-0 7 ♕e1 ♘c6 8 c3

Following Smyslov. For 8 ♕h4 see Larsen-Schmidt, Game 13.

8...b6



Varying from Illivitzki's 8...♗g4. 8...♕c7 features in Game 12.

9 ♘bd2

9 ♕h4 ♗a6 and Black makes use of the undefended e2-bishop.

9...♘g4

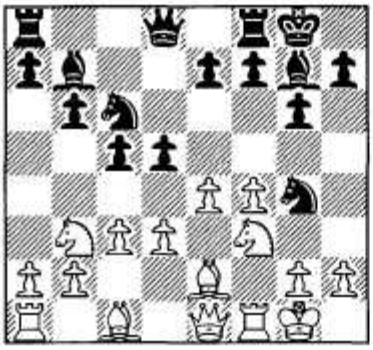
This is rather over-elaborate. Instead 9...♗b7 is okay, but simple and best is 9...♕c7, preventing e3-e4 because of the hanging f-pawn: 10 e4? ♕xf4 11 exd5 ♘xd5 12 ♘e4 ♕c7 13 ♕h4 ♕d7 14 ♘fg5 (14 h3 f5 is overwhelming) 14...h6 15 ♘f3 ♕g4 and Black is simply up a good pawn, while on other moves Black is ready to play ...e7-e5 and stands well.

10 ♘b3 ♗b7

In the event of 10...♗a6 White gets an edge with 11 e4, so best is the simple retreat 10...♘f6. Black can even hope for

a draw with 11 ♘bd2. Of course White can find another move, but I think in the long run White will also have to give back a tempo and move his queen's knight again, as right now this piece's range is severely limited by the a7-b6-c5 pawn chain. This 'one step forward, one step back' line might give Black approximate equality.

11 e4



Once again White obtains the ideal pawn set-up – so characteristic of this variation – and stands better. Black's violent attempt to break up the pawns only makes matters worse.

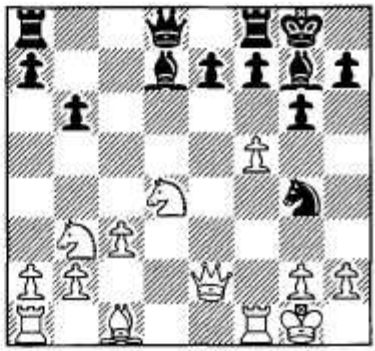
11...c4

Less challenging is 11...dxe4 12 dxe4 ♕c7 (12...e5 13 ♕g3 ♘f6 14 fxe5 ♘xe4 15 ♕f4 f5 16 exf6 ♘xf6 17 ♗c4+ ♔h8 18 ♘g5 ♕e7 19 ♕h4 with an almost winning attack, e.g. 19...♘e5 20 ♘h7!, or 19...♖ae8 20 ♗f4 with a big plus for White) 13 ♕h4 with a pleasant edge for White.

12 exd5 cxd3

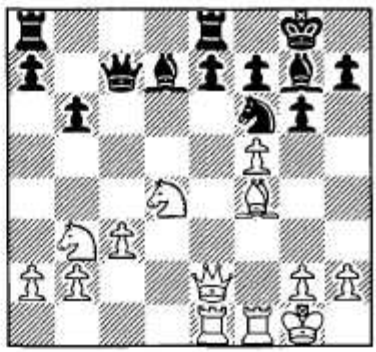
Black has no choice, as after 12...♕xd5 13 dxc4 ♕e4 14 ♘g5 ♕f5 15 ♕g3 he is a pawn down with no compensation.

13 dxc6 dxe2 14 ♕xe2 ♗xc6 15 ♘fd4 ♗d7 16 f5!



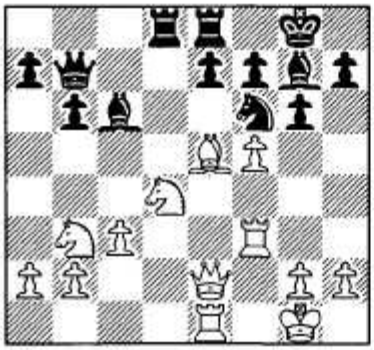
This key Bird thrust is an important theme of the opening and can be seen many times in this book. White makes good use of his first move to attack the Black's castled position. The f-pawn cramps Black, while constantly threatening to open a file – but Black cannot himself capture without creating a huge hole in his defences. All this means that White can calmly build up his attack behind the salient pawn.

16...♘f6 17 ♗g5 ♖e8 18 ♖ae1 ♕c7 19 ♗f4!



Manoeuvring into a still stronger position, in good Petrosian style.

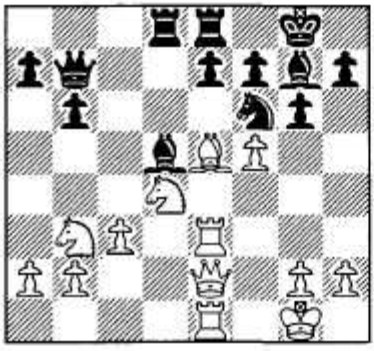
19...♕b7 20 ♗e5 ♖ad8 21 ♖f3 ♗c6



22 ♖h3?!

This is the one serious flaw in the game. White's b3-knight is underused in a supporting role now and, in any case, White only needs one active knight in the centre. Correct is the simple 22 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 23 ♘d4 with the big advantage seen a bit later in the game.

22...♗d5 23 ♖e3



23...♗c6?

Black should hang tough with something like 23...♕c8, which gives his bishop room to retreat.

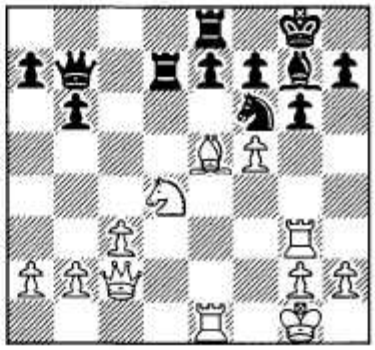
24 ♘xc6

I didn't wait to be asked twice!

24...♕xc6 25 ♘d4 ♕b7 26 ♖g3!

White has a winning attack. Black's weak points are g6 and e6, and with no space on the kingside he can hardly defend both in the long run. I was hoping for the following entertaining variation: 26...♘h5 27 ♕xh5!! gxh5 28 ♖xg7+ ♔f8 29 ♘e6+ fxe6 30 fxe6 ♕a6 31 ♖xh7 and mates, but my opponent preferred another way.

26...♖d7 27 ♕c2!

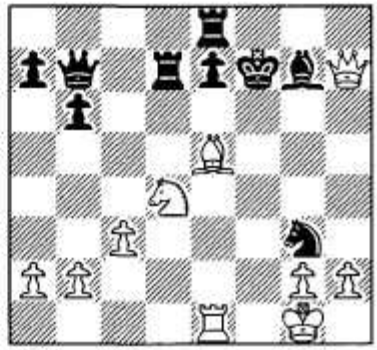


Increasing the pressure; do you get the feeling White is aching to sacrifice a rook on g6?

27...♘h5 28 fxg6! ♘xg3

He doesn't let me do it! 28...hxg6 29 ♖xg6 fxg6 30 ♕xg6 is devastating.

29 gxf7+ ♔xf7 30 ♕xh7



30...♖g8 31 hxg3

Here I missed the slightly quicker 31 ♖f1+! ♘xf1 32 ♕h5+ ♔f8 33 ♘e6 mate. My mate in the main line of the game takes two more moves...

31...e6 32 ♗xg7 ♖xg7 33 ♖f1+ 1-0

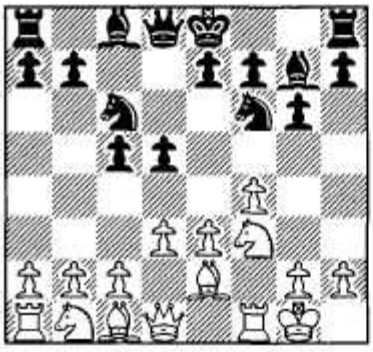
Black resigns as 33...♔e8 34 ♕h8+ ♔e7 35 ♕f8! mate is exceptionally convincing, even if not quite as pretty as the earlier possibility!

Game 12

T.Taylor-A.Kretchetov

Los Angeles (Rapidplay) 2004

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e3 ♗g7 4 ♗e2 c5 5 0-0 ♘c6 6 d3 ♘f6



7 c3

With this move order (Black has played ...♘c6 instead of ...0-0 as in Taylor-Martinez) White has the extra option of 7 ♘e5, but this could be more effective (as in the note to White's 8th move in Game 8, Kan-Browning) with a white knight on c3. It appears that Black can equalize with the exact sequence 7...♕c7 8 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 9 ♘d2 (9 ♗f3 0-0 10 ♕c2 ♕a6!? and Black holds up e3-e4 long enough to equalize) 9...0-0 10 e4 dxe4 11 dxe4 ♘xe4 12 ♗f3 f5 13 ♕c2 e5 14 ♘xe4 fxe4 15 ♗xe4 ♕b6 16 c3 ♗e6 17 ♗e3 with a level game.

7...0-0

Again, the different move order creates some subtleties. Black can't challenge with 7...d4 here (a similar idea would have been playable in Smyslov, Ilivitzki, Game 10) as he is yet to castle. After 7...d4 White generates an attack with 8 ♘e5 ♘xe5 9 fxe5 ♘d7 10 exd4 cxd4 11 cxd4 ♕b6 12 ♔h1 ♕xd4 13 e6! fxe6 14 ♘d2 and Black has problems with both queen and king.

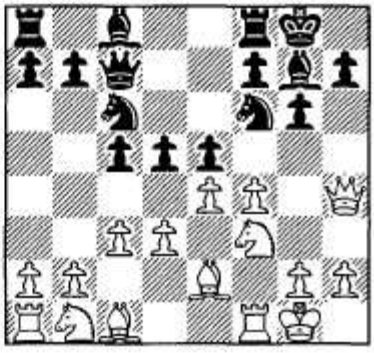
8 ♕e1 ♕c7

This is the simplest – and probably best – against the Smyslov c2-c3/♕c1 idea.

9 ♕h4

In the event of 9 ♕g3, to hold back Black's e-pawn, there comes 9...b6 with the idea of ...♗a6, exploiting White's undefended king's bishop.

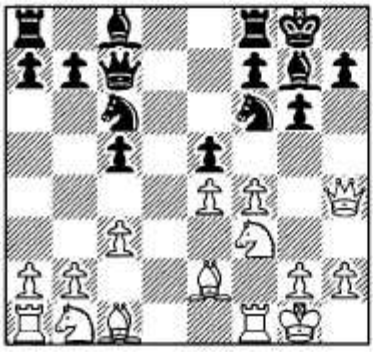
9...e5 10 e4!?



I knew this trick from the Dutch – here is a typical example: 1 d4 e6 2 ♘f3 f5 3 c4 ♘f6 4 g3 d6 5 ♗g2 ♗e7 6 ♘c3 0-0 7 0-0 ♕e8 8 ♕c2 ♕h5 9 e4 e5 10 dxe5 dxe5 11 ♗g5 (11 ♘xe5 fxe4 12 f4

[12 ♗f4? ♗d6] 12...exf3 13 ♘xf3 ♗c5+ 14 ♔h1 ♘c6 and Black is better) 11...fxe4 12 ♘xe4 ♘c6 13 ♘xf6+ gxf6 14 ♗e3 f5 15 ♕b3 f4 when Black had a good game and went on to win in R.Cvek-M.Kobalija, Rimavska Sobota 1996. I thought this line would work even better with the extra tempo – and it worked like a charm in the game – but analysis reveals that this *particular* extra tempo, the usually useful c2-c3, hurts White in this exact position.

10...dxe4 11 dxe4



11...♗g4

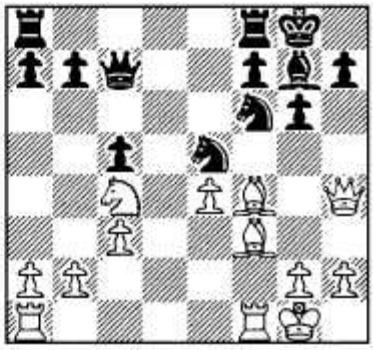
Black should play 11...♘xe4!, taking advantage of *White's* extra tempo! Unlike in the Kobalija game given, above, Black can calmly answer 12 fxe5 with 12...♗f5 as 13 ♗d3? (which wins in the tempo-less Dutch variation) is here bad due to 13...♘g3!, exploiting the fact that 7 c3 has left the bishop unprotected! White can try 13 ♘bd2 or 13 g4 ♗e6 14 ♗d3 f5 15 gxf5 gxf5, but certainly has no advantage in view of Black's centralized pieces.

In other words, Kretchetov's ...♕c7 effectively neutralizes this line, although by failing to follow up correctly (missing 11...♘xe4! and the key tactic that justifies it) he now comes off worse.

12 ♘a3 ♗xf3

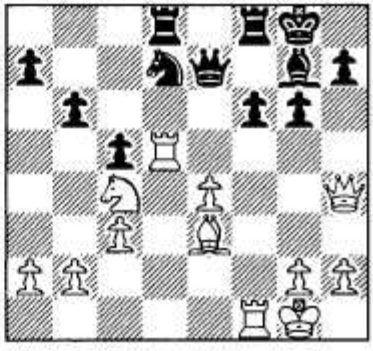
12...exf4 13 h3 ♗xf3 14 ♗xf3 is more accurate for Black, forcing White to lose a tempo with h2-h3.

13 ♗xf3 exf4 14 ♗xf4 ♘e5 15 ♘c4



Now White is evidently better.

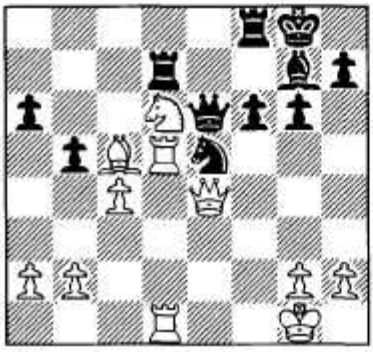
15...♘fd7 16 ♗g4 ♕d8 17 ♗g5 f6 18 ♗xd7 ♘xd7 19 ♗e3 ♕e7 20 ♖ad1 b6 21 ♖d5 ♖ad8



White has all the advantages you could want: dominating pieces, complete control of the centre, a particularly hapless black bishop... All I have to do here is build up a little more with natural moves such as ♖fd1, ♘d6, a2-a4 and so

on, and Black will hardly be able to hold out. Instead I force the issue for no good reason, and even activate Black's moribund bishop!

22 e5? b5 23 ♘d6 ♘xe5 24 ♗xc5 ♕e6 25 ♖fd1 a6 26 ♕e4 ♖d7 27 c4?



Another impetuous and dubious pawn move! Correct is 27 ♕e2 (removing the queen from the tempo gaining ...f6-f5) when White is fine – perhaps still slightly better. This is no longer the case after the move played.

27...bxc4 28 ♘xc4 f5

Black wins material.

29 ♘xe5 fxe4 30 ♘xd7 ♖e8 31 ♗e3 ♗xb2 32 ♘c5 ♕c6 33 ♖d7 ♗a3 34 ♘b7 ♕c2 35 ♗h6 e3... 0-1

Black won after a few more (unrecorded) time pressure moves.

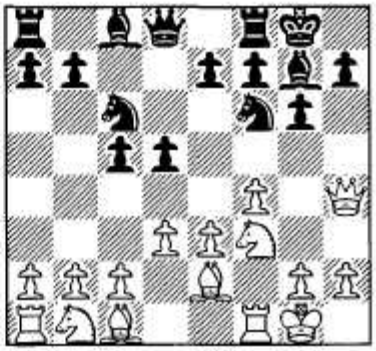
One can conclude that the Smyslov variation with ♕e1 and c2-c3 offers nothing against a well prepared opponent.

Game 13

B.Larsen-W.Schmidt

European Team Ch., Aarhus 1971

1 f4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 d3 d5 4 e3 ♗g7 5 ♗e2 0-0 6 0-0 c5 7 ♕e1 ♘c6 8 ♕h4



Primitive and direct. Bent Larsen has had wonderful results with the Bird's all his life, but not with this move! He usually likes subtle ideas and full board play, so I don't know why he became attached to this crude attacking move which, being so obvious, is easy to defend against. This is the game that finally destroyed Bent's faith in the idea (as they say, the third time is the charm). First he played it against Benko with a lucky draw. Then again against Bobotsov – he loses, but he blunders badly at one point, so maybe it's not the opening that is to blame. But then there comes this debacle! I will give the other games in full in the notes.

8...b6 9 ♘bd2 ♗a6

Bobotsov played 9...♗b7 here, and after 10 c3 ♖e8 11 d4 ♖f8 12 g4 ♘e4 13 ♗d3 ♘d6 14 ♖f2 e6 15 ♕h3 ♕c7 16 ♘g5 h6 17 ♘gf3 ♖ac8 18 ♘f1 ♘e4 19 ♖g2 ♘a5 20 ♘g3 ♘c4 21 f5 ♘cd6 Black was better, but Bent could have more or less held on with 22 g5. Instead a 'small oversight' occurred: 22 ♘e5?? ♘g5 23 ♕h4 ♗xe5 24 ♔h1 ♗g7 25 ♗d2 ♘de4 26 ♖f1 exf5 27 gxf5 ♖c6 28

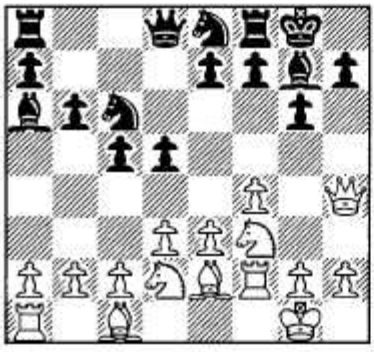
♗xe4 dxe4 29 d5 ♖f6 30 c4 ♘f3 31 ♕f4 ♘xd2 32 ♖xd2 ♗c8 33 d6 ♕b7 34 ♖d5 ♖e8 35 ♖g1 ♔h8 36 h4 ♗d7 37 h5 g5 38 ♕g4 ♗c6 39 ♖d2 ♕d7 40 ♖gd1 ♗f8 41 ♔g1 ♖e5 42 b3 ♔g7 43 ♖d5 ♗xd5 44 cxd5 ♕xd6 45 ♘xe4 ♖xe4 46 ♕xe4 ♕g3+ 0-1, B.Larsen-M.Bobotsov, Beverwijk 1964.

10 ♖f2

Bent's first try, against Benko, was 10 ♘e5 ♘xe5 11 fxe5 ♘d7 12 e6 fxe6 13 ♘f3 e5 14 e4 dxe4 15 ♕xe4 ♘f6 16 ♕xe5 ♕d6 17 ♗f4 ♘d5 18 ♕xg7+ ♔xg7 19 ♗xd6 exd6 20 ♘g5 ♘c7 21 ♗f3 d5 22 ♖fe1 ♖ae8 23 ♗g4 h6 24 ♘f3 d4 and this was the end of the game, ½-½, B.Larsen-P.Benko, Portoroz Interzonal 1958. Someone offered a draw, someone took it – but with ...♘d5-e3 coming, White should really be *praying* for a draw, not accepting one. It isn't at all clear why ending maestro Benko agreed to make peace here in a clearly superior position; possibly time pressure is the explanation.

This time Larsen decides to push his luck with a third try.

10...♘e8!



So much for White's attack. Black can't be stopped from playing ...e7-e5 with a central superiority (which has been known since Steinitz as the most effective remedy to a flank attack). Furthermore, when Black advances his e-pawn he directly challenges the white queen, without which no kingside attack is possible.

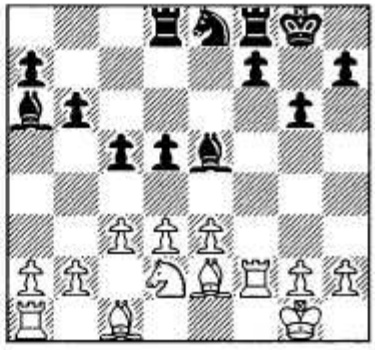
11 c3 e5

Spare a thought for Larsen here – he has to realize that after just eleven moves, playing one of his favourite openings with White, he already stands worse.

12 ♕xd8

Recognizing his difficulties, White tries to draw. Even worse is 12 ♕g3 e4! 13 dxe4 ♗e2 14 ♖e2 and the e-pawn is immune in view of ♕d3, so White just has a cramped, ugly position.

12...♖xd8 13 fxe5 ♘xe5 14 ♘xe5 ♗xe5



White has no attack, no development and a very poor bishop!

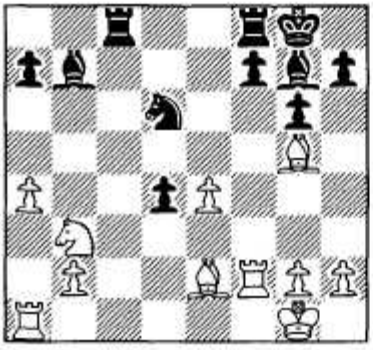
15 a4 ♗b7 16 d4 ♗g7 17 dxc5 bxc5 18 ♘b3 ♖c8 19 e4 d4

Black avoids the positional trap 19...dxe4? 20 ♗e3, when White has counterplay.

20 cxd4 cxd4 21 ♗g5

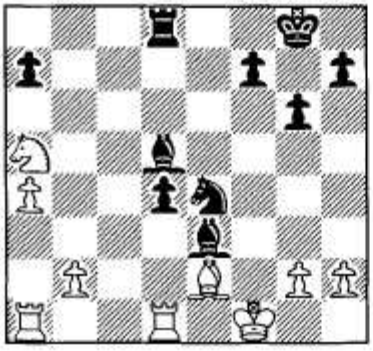
Better is 21 ♗g4 ♘d6 22 ♗xc8 ♖xc8 23 ♖d2 ♘xe4 24 ♖xd4 (24 ♖d1 f5 25 ♗f4 g5 and Black is much better) 24...♗xd4+ 25 ♘xd4 and White has some chances to draw.

21...♘d6!



In return for the exchange Black gets a central passed pawn plus dominating bishops.

22 ♗e7 ♘xe4 23 ♗xf8 ♗xf8 24 ♖ff1 ♗h6 25 ♖fd1 ♗e3+ 26 ♔f1 ♖d8 27 ♘a5 ♗d5



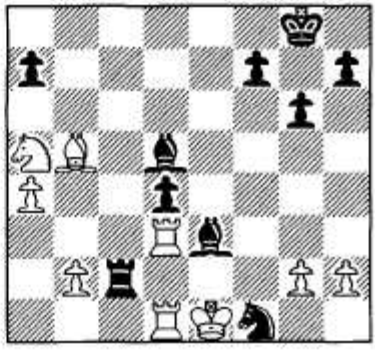
28 ♗b5

A more tenacious try is 28 ♘c4 ♗xc4 29 ♗xc4 ♘d2+ and Black will still have technical difficulties to overcome.

28...♖c8 29 ♖a3 ♘d2+ 30 ♔e1 ♖c2

The invasion is decisive.

31 ♖d3 ♘f1!



A stylish finish! The knight can't be taken in view of 32 ♔xf1 ♗xg2+ 33 ♔e1 ♗f2 mate.

32 ♖xd4 ♗xg2 33 ♖d8+ ♔g7 34 ♗e2 ♘xh2 35 ♖1d3

35 ♘c4 ♘f3+ 36 ♗xf3 ♗f2 mate.

35...♗b6 36 b4 ♗xd8 37 ♖xd8 ♗f3 38 ♗c4 ♘g4 39 ♖e8 ♔f6 40 ♗b3 ♖b2 41 b5 h5 0-1

After this game Larsen continued to play the Bird with great success, but he never played 8 ♕h4 again. This was a wise decision, and we can consider this primitive attack to be refuted.

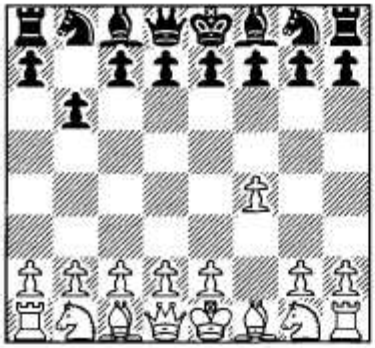
Game 14

T.Taylor-A.Ivanov

Reno 2004

1 f4 b6

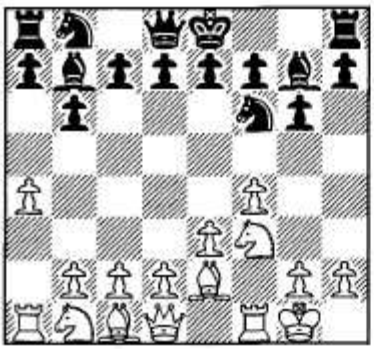
My high rated GM opponent stared curiously at my advanced f-pawn for four minutes before he finally embarked on this English defence. He could have used that time later, so in one sense the Bird proved its worth immediately.



2 ♘f3

My quiet play in the opening allows Black to eventually transpose back to Classical lines. It is also possible to immediately claim centre squares with 2 e4, for which see Karlsson-Berg, Game 50 in Chapter 11.

2...♗b7 3 e3 g6 4 ♗e2 ♗g7 5 0-0 ♘f6 6 a4!

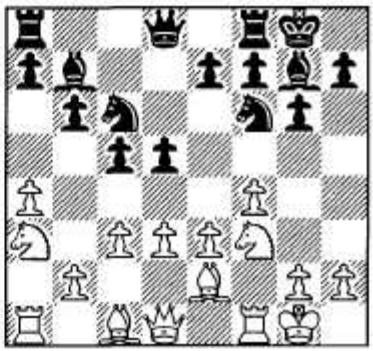


The theme of this game. White plays for queenside pressure before embarking on a kingside attack.

6...c5 7 d3 ♘c6

Even if Black had played a more usual move order, the a2-a4 thrust (rarely employed in the Bird's, but well known in the Dutch) can prove useful. Consider C.Wheatley-J.Cobb, Swansea 1999: 1 f4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 d3 d5 4 e3 ♗g7 5 ♗e2 0-0 6 0-0 c5 7 a4 (the key idea) 7...♘c6 8 ♘a3 b6 9 ♕e1 ♗b7 10 c3 ♖c8 11 ♖b1 e6 12 b4 ♘e7 and now White could have obtained an advantage with 13 bxc5 ♖c5 14 ♘b5. This is definitely worth further study.

8 ♘a3 0-0 9 c3 d5



This is a well known Classical Dutch position, with a useful extra tempo.

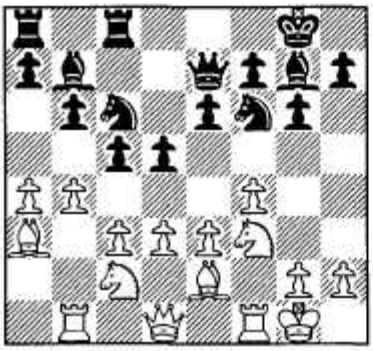
10 ♖b1 e6 11 b4

This thrust is slightly premature because Black now has a tricky tactic. White should play 11 ♘c2 first, and then b2-b4. White's idea is to chip away at Black's control of the key central dark squares d4 and e5, while also preparing to activate the queen's bishop on b2 or a3, for example 11 ♘c2 ♕e7 12 b4 and now 12...c4? would fail horribly to 13 b5 and ♗a3, when White wins, but of course Black can play 12...♖fc8, transposing to the game.

11...♕e7

Sharper is 11...c4! (the aforementioned tactic), when Black achieves good play after 12 dxc4 ♘e4 with a double attack on c3.

12 ♘c2 ♖fc8 13 ♗a3



White has definite pressure and stands somewhat better.

13...♗f8

A critical point. In the previous game I criticized Bent Larsen's 'primitive' early ♕e1-h4. It is very rare one can defeat a modern GM with a simple direct attack, and Bent found this out – three times! The best way to attack is to conceal your intentions until the last moment. Here Black is heavily engaged on the queenside, so now's the time. Correct is 14 ♕e1! with the idea of ♕h4, exploiting the poorly defended knight on f6 and Black's overloaded queen. I believe White earns a clear advantage with this full board strategy, and that Black should have an extraordinarily difficult defensive task ahead of him as he is engaged on all fronts but has no active play.

14 bxc5

This simpler idea is also not bad, but soon White gets over ambitious.

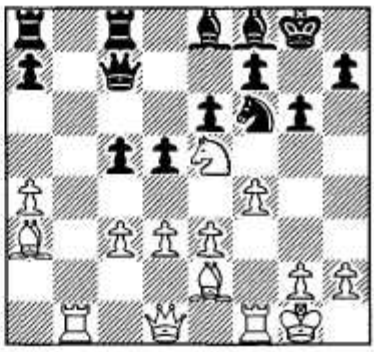
14...bxc5 15 ♘cd4

After 15 ♗xc5 ♕xc5 16 ♖xb7 ♘a5 and Black recovers his pawn with advantage.

15...♕c7 16 ♘xc6

16 ♘b3, maintaining the pressure while attempting to induce the advance of Black's c-pawn and the subsequent exchange of the defending bishop on f8 is also good.

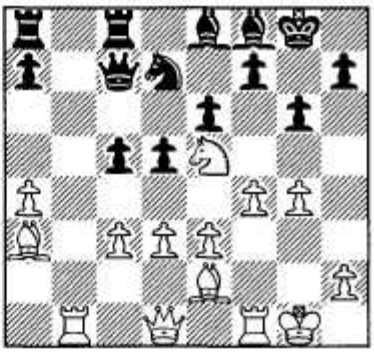
16...♗xc6 17 ♘e5 ♗e8



18 g4?!

This serves only to weaken the kingside without leading to a genuine attack. A preferable course is to add to the pressure with both bishops after 18 ♗f3 ♘d7 19 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 20 c4, when White is still a little better.

18...♘d7



19 d4?

Horrible! Now Black can win a pawn in two ways. I should have admitted that

my plan was mistaken and retreated with 19 ♘f3.

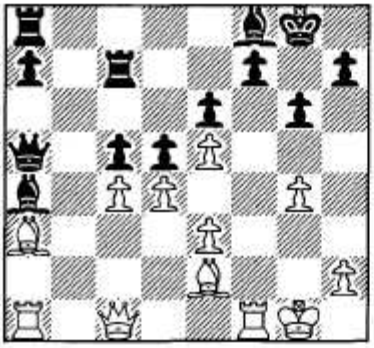
19...♕a5

Yes, this wins a pawn, but a superior alternative is 19...cxd4! 20 ♗xf8 dxc3 and White is dead.

20 c4 ♘xe5 21 fxe5 ♗xa4 22 ♕c1 ♖c7?!

Black has won a pawn but needs to continue accurately as the queen and bishop on the same file invite a pin. Instead the active 22...♗h6! (with the idea ...cxd4) improves, when White has no time to drum up counterplay, as can be seen in the following line: 23 ♗xc5 (23 h4 cxd4 24 g5 d3 25 ♗xd3 ♗g7 26 ♗b4 ♕a6 27 ♖a1 ♕c6 and Black has consolidated) 23...♖xc5 24 dxc5 ♕xc5 25 ♖f3 d4 and, with two pawns for the exchange and active bishops, Black stands clearly better.

23 ♖a1!

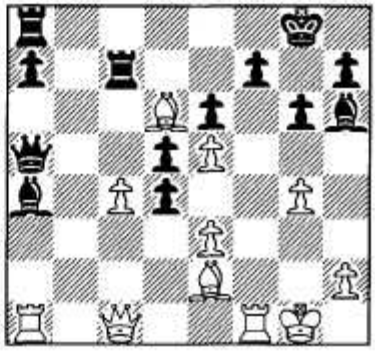


Suddenly the latent pin gives White counterplay, albeit with no advantage. While Black can't slip out (21...♕b6 22 ♗c5), Ivanov does have a number of tactical resources.

23...cxd4 24 ♗d6!?

Sounder and simpler is 24 exd4 ♗xa3 25 ♕xa3 ♕d2 26 ♖f2 ♗c6 27 ♖d1 ♕g5 28 c5 ♗b5 29 ♗f3 and White, with his good bishop and protected passed pawn, has almost full positional compensation for the missing pawn. However, I am playing for a win in my opponent's time pressure!

24...♗h6

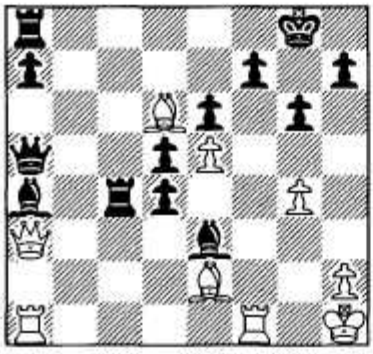


25 ♔h1

Apparently White can now win by exploiting Black's overloaded queen, but this is not the case. 25 ♕e1 looks decisive since after this Black loses either his bishop or rook, but there is some magic in store: 25...♗xe3+ 26 ♔g2 ♕xe1 27 ♖fxe1 ♗c6!! and Black sacrifices a full rook for extremely dangerous passed pawns! (27...♖cc8 28 ♖xa4, with a decisive advantage for White, is what one might expect). There follows 28 ♗xc7 dxc4+ and now the passed pawns are too strong after 29 ♔g3 ♖c8 30 ♗d6 ♗d5, for example 31 ♖xa7 d3 32 ♗d3 ♗a7 and Black wins, 31 ♖ac1 ♗xc1 32 ♖xc1 ♖c6 when Black's four extra pawns are better than White's bishop, and 31 ♗f3 c3 32 ♗xd5 exd5 33 ♗a3 (33 ♔f3 c2 34 ♖ac1 ♗h6 35 h4 d3 36 g5 d2 37 ♖ed1 dxc1♕ 38 ♖xc1 ♗f8) 33...c2 34 ♗b2 (34

♔f3 ♖c3) 34...♗d2 35 ♖e2 ♗b4 36 ♗xd4 c1♕ 37 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 38 ♗xa7 ♗c3 and Black is a pawn up in the ending. Thus the main variation runs 29 ♗f3 ♖c8 30 ♖xa7 c3! 31 ♗xc6 d3! (nothing matters but pushing the babies!) 32 ♖xe3 c2 33 ♖xd3 c1♕ 34 ♖d6 ♕c4 and apparently Black stands better in this extraordinary position – the queen dominates White's rook and two bishops, for example 35 ♖b7 ♕c2+ 36 ♔g1 ♖a8 37 ♖b8+ ♖xb8 38 ♗xb8 ♕c3+ 39 ♔g2 ♕b6 and Black wins. Needless to say, this was a Fritz-assisted variation; I'm not sure either player could have made it through this labyrinth, especially under pressure from the clock.

25...♗xe3 26 ♕a3 ♖xc4!



Played instantly by Ivanov, this was the defensive resource he had counted on, as 27 ♗c4 dxc4 wins for Black in view of the mate threat on the long diagonal.

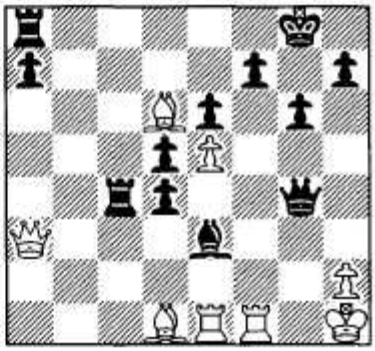
27 ♗d1!

Blow for blow! Now White wins a piece, but Black gets a lot of pawns and my king position is shaky.

27...♕d2 28 ♗xa4 ♕e2 29 ♖ae1

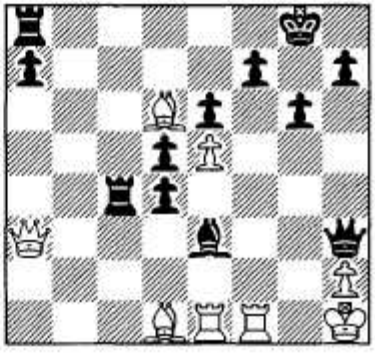
The (similar) attack that later works in the game fails at this point: 29 ♕b3 ♕xg4 30 ♖a2 ♖ac8 31 ♕b7 ♕c4+ 32 ♖g2 ♕f3!! (exploiting White's weak back rank) 33 ♖e1 d3 and Black will win.

29...♕xg4 30 ♗d1



30...♕h3?

Time pressure costs Black. 30...♕e4+! 31 ♗f3 ♕h4 is correct, when White is in trouble, e.g. 32 ♕b3 (32 ♕a6 ♗f4 33 ♖e2 d3 34 ♕b7 ♖d8 35 ♖g2 ♖c2 36 ♗e7 g5 37 ♗xd8 ♖xg2 and mates) 32...♗f4 33 ♖e2 ♕h3 and Black has a winning attack.

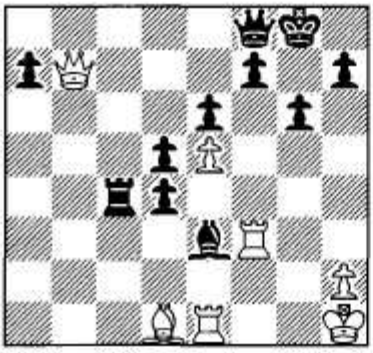


31 ♕b3!

Suddenly White is much better! The difference between this position and the above variations is that here Black can't set up the mating battery of ♕h4/♗f4,

which not only threatens h2 but defends against White's f-file play. Without that resource Black will be forced to sacrifice an exchange on f8, with no real drawing chances.

31...♕h6 32 ♕b7 ♖f8 33 ♗xf8 ♕xf8 34 ♖f3



The Bird f-file is decisive!

34...♖b4

Saving the pawn loses the king: 34...a5 35 ♖ef1 f5 36 exf6 a4 37 ♕e7 and White wins easily, e.g. 37...a3 38 f7+ ♔g7 39 ♕f6+ ♔h6 40 ♖h3 mate.

35 ♕xa7 g5 36 ♖f6 ♖b1 37 ♖ef1 ♗f4 38 ♕xd4 ♕h6

Black threatens mate and so delays resigning for one more move.

39 ♖xh6 1-0

Despite the ups and downs of the middlegame the early a2-a4 idea looks like a good – and unexplored – try for advantage.

Summary

In this variation White plays a Classical Dutch with an extra tempo, a key decision being made on the seventh move. The direct attempt to use the additional tempo with 7 ♘c3 to enforce e3-e4 (Game 8) looks very promising to me, but there is little practical experience. The most popular move in this position, 7 ♕e1, cannot be recommended, despite the big names with whom it is linked. It is simply too early to commit the queen, and we see Black equalize very smoothly, or even emerge ahead. One should especially note Game 12, where the extra tempo hurts White! The most subtle continuation is the a2-a4 idea seen in Game 14 (and in Wheatley-Cobb, mentioned in the notes). This provides a no-risk but effective use of the extra tempo, and should appeal to positional players.

CHAPTER TWO

White's Queenside Fianchetto

The saying in real estate is that there are only three things that give a house its value: location, location, and location! In this chapter the three things that matter are move order, move order, and move order! Unlike the previous chapter, which was full of untrodden ground and untested variations, the queenside fianchetto lines have been popular for a hundred years, and the main lines are pretty well worked out.

First of all White can't even think of an advantage with this line unless Black allows the fianchetto to begin with! In other words, if Black plays 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6 you are out of luck! Yes, you might be able to pull off a small fianchetto as in Blatny-Fridman, Game 15, but Black has various easy ways to equalize in this line, and practical results favour Black unless White is content with a draw.

There are only two ways White can get an edge, and both require co-operation from Black. First, Black might let the Orang-utan into the house! This means the second player delays his kingside fianchetto *and* delays ...c7-c5, too. Check this out in Larsen-Dely, Game 16.

Second, Black might let you pin his queen's knight. The exchange of White's king's bishop for this piece leaves Black weak on the dark squares (which you have presciently occupied with your queen's bishop), offering White serious chances both of a kingside attack and a promising good knight versus bad bishop ending. A typical example is Taylor-Salinas, Game 17.

In the last game of this chapter we consider what happens if White insists on forcing the fianchetto no matter what. The only problem with this attitude is that it doesn't work! The great Nimzowitsch discovered this, to his horror, in Game 18, Nimzowitsch-Steiner, and no improvements have been found since.

I'm not going to dwell too much on this chapter as it is mostly old news and there are no serious chances for a White edge against Black's best move orders. However, given how few players actually

prepare for the Bird's, you might find a few who sail blissfully into a bad position, unaware that their casual choice on move two or three could make their subsequent game quite difficult.

Game 15
P.Blatny-D.Fridman
Bermuda 2003

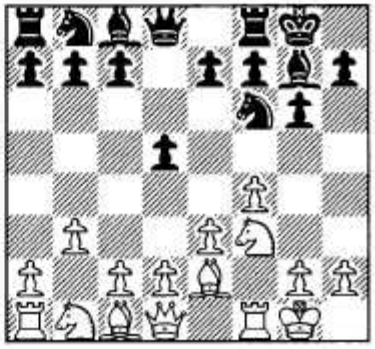
1 f4

The Bird can often be reached by the Larsen's Opening move order. This makes sure you get the queenside fianchetto in, but the drawback is Black might prevent the Bird's by playing (1 b3) 1...e5. However, other moves usually allow a transposition. Here, for example, we see a world class player fall to a Bird attack: M.Basman-J.Timman, London 1975 began 1 b3 d5 2 ♗b2 ♗g4 (waiting for a knight to come out, but Basman disappoints him) 3 f3 ♗f5 (3...♗h5 may be a steadier equalizer, e.g. 4 ♘h3!? [4 g4?! ♗g6 5 h4 ♕d6 6 ♘h3 h5 and White is overextended] 4...♘c6 5 ♘f4 ♗g6 which looks equal) 4 f4 (the Bird arrives in a curious way, with an extra move for each player – Black is using a London system of defence, which is often played against the Réti) 4...e6 5 e3 ♘f6 6 ♘f3 ♘bd7 7 g3!? (quirky and original, in Basman's style; I played more classically in an almost identical position in Taylor-Jayson, Los Angeles 2004, which went 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 c6 3 e3 ♗f5 4 ♗e2 ♘f6 5 0-0 e6 6 b3 ♗d6 7 ♗b2 ♘bd7 [the same London system for Black] and White continued simply with 8 ♘e5, d2-d3, ♘bd2-f3 and so on and eventually 1-0; but Basman can hardly be criticized for forcing Timman out of his comfort zone) 7...♗d6 8 ♗g2 c6 9 0-0 0-0 10 d3 ♗g4 11 d4 ♘e4 12 ♘bd2 ♗b4 13 ♕c1 ♗xf3 14 ♘xf3 ♗c3 15 ♗xc3 ♘xc3 16 ♕e1 ♘e4 17 ♘d2 ♘xd2?! (Black might keep it equal with 17...f5 18 c4 ♕c7 19 ♖c1 ♘df6) 18 ♕xd2 and White emerged with the better minor piece and went on to win.

1...d5 2 e3 g6

One of the best move orders for Black. Fridman makes it difficult for his opponent to fianchetto, while also rendering any check on b5 absurd.

3 ♗e2 ♗g7 4 ♘f3 ♘f6 5 0-0 0-0 6 b3



In my opinion this leads to equality at best, given Black's solid position and accurate move order. Even worse is to try an Orang-utan here, as after 6 b4 ♘e4 7 c3 a5 8 b5 c5 Black is already better in view of White's motley pawn structure. I recommend 6 d3 with serious chances of advantage, as in Chapter 1.

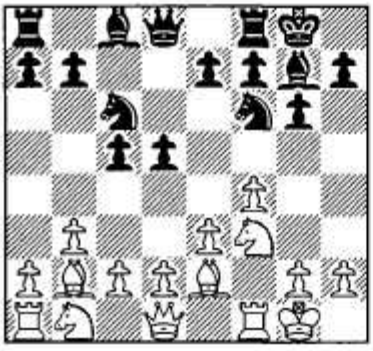
6...c5

Black allows the main line, since he evidently (and I would say correctly) views it as harmless – but Black can also

equalize directly with 6...♘e4. White has nothing special, 7 ♘e5 possibly being best, but Black has no problems whatsoever after 7...♘d7 8 ♗b2 ♘xe5 9 fxe5 f6. The only reasonable alternative is 7 d4, but after 7...♗f5 8 ♗b2 c5 9 ♘bd2 ♘c6 Black has excellent play against White's wall.

7 ♗b2 ♘c6

The critical position of this line. Black threatens 8...d4 to shut out the bishop.



8 ♘e5

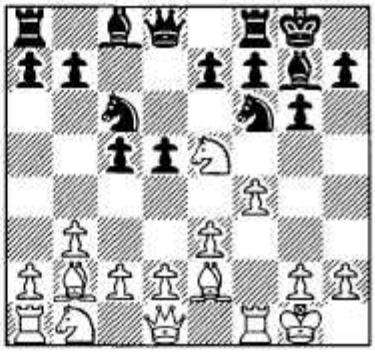
As far as I can see this is White's only reasonable continuation (always played by Blatny). All other moves are weaker:

a) 8 d4 mechanically prevents ...d5-d4 but does so by self-blocking the queen's bishop. White enters a not so good Stonewall, with both ...♕b6 and ...♘e4 giving Black an edge. The latter move led to an amusing disaster in U.Wesslen-D.Dumitrache, Gothenburg 2004, 8...♘e4 9 ♘bd2 ♘d6 10 ♘e5 ♘f5 11 ♖f3 cxd4 leaving White already finished.

b) 8 ♕e1 d4 9 ♘a3 ♘d5 10 ♖d1 d3 11 ♗xg7 dxe2 12 ♗xf8 exd1♕ 13 ♕xd1 ♕xf8 14 c4 ♘f6 15 d4 ♗f5 16 d5 ♘b4 17 h3 ♖d8 18 g4 ♗d3 19 ♖f2 e6 20 ♘b5 ♘fxd5 21 a3 0-1 was the horrendous debacle of J.Purdy-B.Spassky, Antwerp 1955.

c) 8 d3 d4 (stifling the queen's bishop is best, immediately exploiting the hole on d3, while IM Jeremy Silman suggests 8...b6?!, playing for the trap 9 ♘bd2?? ♘g4 and Black wins – but an alert player could solve his problems with 9 ♘e5!) 9 e4 ♘g4 10 ♗c1 (10 ♕c1 e5 11 fxe5 ♗h6 12 ♘bd2 ♕e7 13 c3 ♘cxe5 14 cxd4 ♗e3+ 15 ♔h1 ♘xf3 16 gxf3 ♘xh2 17 ♕e1 ♘xf1 18 ♘xf1 ♗xd4 19 ♗xd4 cxd4 20 ♕f2 ♕c5 21 f4 f5 22 ♘g3 ♗e6 23 ♖g1 ♖ad8 24 e5 ♔h8 0-1 was another quick crush for Black, A.Fayard-T.Naumkin, Rome 2004) 10...♘e3 11 ♗xe3 dxe3 12 c3 e5 and White's undeveloped position is coming apart.

d) With 8 ♗b5 White enters the line from Game 17 a tempo down; this is hardly a serious winning attempt, especially as Black can play 8...♘a5 (threatening 9...c4) 9 ♗e2 and White took the draw by repetition in K.Chernyshov-A.Lastin, Elista 2001.



8...♘xe5

Equally good is 8...♗d7 9 d3 ♘e8 10 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 11 ♗xg7 ♘xg7 12 ♕e1 ♕d6 13 ♘d2 e5 14 ♕f2 exf4 15 exf4

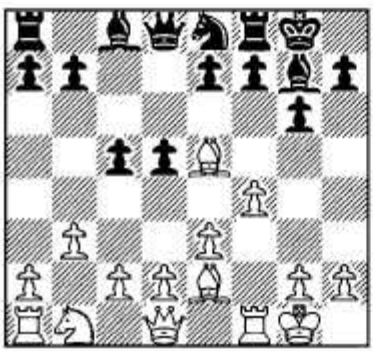
♖ae8 16 ♖ae1 ♖c7 17 ♗g4 ♖xe1 18 ♖xe1 ♖e8 19 ♖xe8+ ♘xe8 20 g3 b6 21 ♗f3 ♘c7 22 ♗g2 ♔g7 23 a4?! and Black managed to take advantage of White's weakened queenside and win in M.David-M.Botvinnik, Leningrad 1938. White could have kept the balance with 23 d4.

Note that in none of these lines does White have the slightest chance for an advantage.

9 ♗xe5

9 fxe5 ♘d7 10 d4 f6 gave Black adequate counterplay in D.Genocchio-F.Castaldo, Cortina d'Ampezzo 2004.

9...♘e8



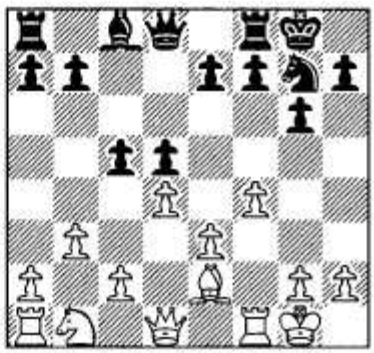
10 ♗xg7

White must exchange, as after 10 ♗f3 Black takes over the centre with ...f7-f6 and ...e7-e5.

10...♘xg7 11 d4

Blatny has had this position four times according to the database. Each time he has played 11 d4, with the score being three wins for Black, and just one draw. What is the reason for this disastrous result? In my opinion, he was trying to get too much out of the opening. 11 d4 fixes Black's centre pawn on the same colour as his bishop, so White might hope for a positional advantage, but the move also loses time for White and creates fresh weaknesses.

The fact of the matter is that the queen's fianchetto variation gives White nothing against a correct move order from Black. Therefore it is best to simply play within the position and accept a probable draw, a good example being the following game: 11 ♗f3 ♖b8 12 ♘c3 d4 13 ♘e4 dxc3 14 dxc3 b6 15 ♕e1 ♗b7 16 ♘g5 e5 17 ♕c3 exf4 18 exf4 ♘f5 19 ♖ad1 ♘d4 20 ♔h1 ♕c8 21 ♗xb7 ♖xb7 22 ♘f3 ♘xf3 23 ♖xf3 ♖d8 ½-½, G.Szilagyi-R.Dworzynski, Warsaw 1956. Admittedly this sort of game might put you to sleep, but it won't cost you a full point!



11...♕a5

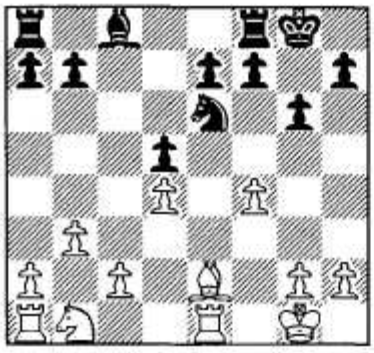
Also good is 11...♘f5 12 ♕d2 cxd4 (12...♕b6 13 g4 cxd4?? 14 gxf5 dxe3 15 ♕xd5, Blatny—Nakamura, New York [rapidplay] 2003 was the above mentioned draw, although of course White was winning here – strange things can happen in a rapidplay game) 13 exd4 ♕b6 14 ♖d1 ♗d7 15 ♘c3 e6 16 g4 ♘d6 17 f5 ♖ac8 18 f6 ♕a5 19 b4 (19 ♕h6

♘e8 and Black wins material) 19...♕a3 20 ♘b1 ♕b2 21 ♕f4 ♘e4 22 ♗f3 ♘xf6 23 ♕xf6 ♕xa1 24 h4 ♖xc2 25 h5 ♖fc8 26 h6 ♔f8 27 ♕f4 ♕b2 28 ♖f1 ♖2c4 29 ♗e4 ♕xd4+ 30 ♔h2 ♗e8 31 ♕d6+ ♔g8 32 ♗xg6 hxg6 0-1, P.Blatny-R.Rabiega, Austria 2002.

12 ♕e1

Undeterred by the present game, Blatny willingly took on this position again the next year against the same opponent. The Blatny-Fridman rematch (Las Vegas 2004) continued 12 g4 ♗d7 13 ♕d3 cxd4 14 exd4 b5 (rather like the famous game Bogoljubow-Capablanca, New York 1924, Black pressures White's queenside, which is weakened by the absence of the queen's bishop) 15 a4 b4 16 ♕c3 ♖ac8 17 ♖a2 ♕b6 18 a5 ♕f6 and Black was already better, and won again!

12...♕xe1 13 ♖xe1 cxd4 14 exd4 ♘e6



This simple fork leaves White struggling to equalize, even if he can somehow save material.

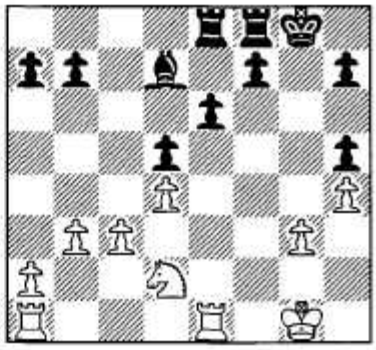
15 c3

15 ♗d3 is a better try – 15...♖d8 (15...♘xf4 16 ♖xe7 ♘xd3 17 cxd3 b6 18 ♘c3 ♗e6 19 ♘b5 and White might hold) 16 ♘c3 ♘xf4 17 ♖xe7 ♔f8 18 ♖e3 ♘xd3 19 ♖xd3 ♗f5 20 ♖c3 ♖ac8 and Black is only a little better, although that's hardly an advertisement for White's ambitious 11 d4.

15...♘xf4

Black snaps off a pawn and hangs on to it!

16 ♗f3 e6 17 h4 ♗d7 18 g3 ♘h5 19 ♗xh5 gxh5 20 ♘d2 ♖ae8



21 ♖e3

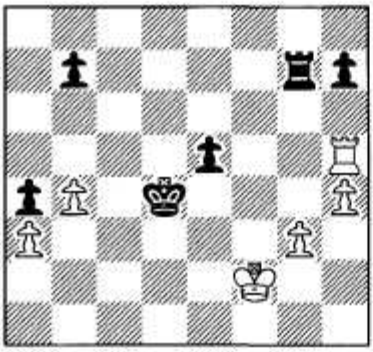
21 ♖e5? f6 22 ♖xh5 ♖c8 23 c4 ♗c8 picks off the rook.

21...f6 22 ♖ae1 ♔f7 23 ♔f2 a5 24 a3 ♖e7 25 ♘f3 a4 26 b4 ♗b5 27 ♖c1 ♔e8 28 ♖c2 ♔d7 29 ♔g2 ♖g7 30 ♖f2 ♖gf7 31 ♘g1 ♔d6 32 ♘h3 ♗e8 33 ♘f4 ♖e7 34 ♖ef3 ♖c7 35 ♘e2 ♗g6 36 ♔f1 ♔e7 37 ♔e1 ♗e4 38 ♖e3 e5

With both the centre pawns and bishop activated the win is merely a question of time. The game continued:

39 ♔d2 ♖fc8 40 dxe5 fxe5 41 ♘g1 ♖c4 42 ♖fe2 ♔d6 43 ♖f2 ♔e7 44 ♖f1 ♖8c6 45 ♘f3 ♗xf3 46 ♖exf3 d4 47 ♖f7+ ♔e6 48 ♖1f6+ ♔d5 49 ♖xc6 ♔xc6 50 cxd4 ♖xd4+ 51 ♔e3

♖d7 52 ♖f5 ♔d5 53 ♖xh5 ♖g7 54 ♔f2 ♔d4



55 ♖h6 e4 56 ♖e6 ♔d3 57 ♖d6+ ♔c4 58 ♖e6 ♔b3 59 ♖xe4 ♔xa3 60 b5 b6 61 g4 ♔b3 62 g5 a3 63 ♖e3+ ♔b4 64 ♖e4+ ♔xb5 65 ♖e5+ ♔c6 66 ♖e6+ ♔c5 67 ♔f3 ♖a7 0-1

The connected pawns win. This is not a line in which White can play for anything more than comfortable equality. Trying for more will rebound, as Blatny discovered. Generally, if Black has his move order properly sorted in this system he has nothing to fear. So let's look at a couple of average move orders!

Game 16

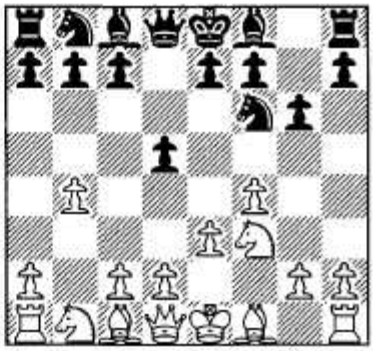
B.Larsen-P.Dely

Moscow 1962

1 f4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 e3 g6

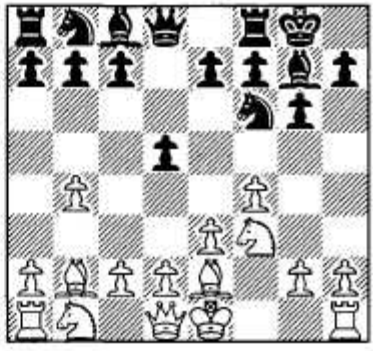
As was seen in Game 15, the simplest move order for Black is 1...d5, 2...g6 and 3...♗g7. However, the present game's order is also not bad, but Black should now continue with 3...c5 4 ♗e2 (4 ♗b5+ ♗d7 and Black keeps the knight in order to monitor e5) 4...g6 and White can't get the dangerous Bird/Orang-utan.

4 b4



A hairy ape is in the house! The Orang's long furry arms extend to b4 and f4, controlling key dark squares while preventing the standard counter ...c7-c5 and ...d5-d4, which was threatened in the previous game. White has quite good chances for an advantage, as we already saw in Game 5.

4...♗g7 5 ♗b2 0-0 6 ♗e2



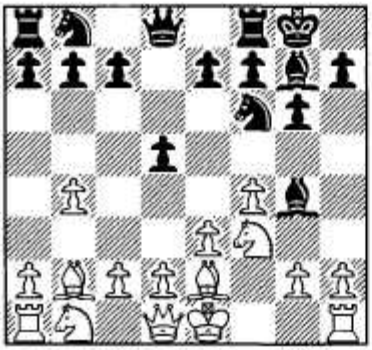
6...♗g4

Alternatives:

a) 6...b6 might be the most solid answer to the Bird/Orang-utan. T.Taylor-A.Szeberenyi, Budapest 2003 continued 7 0-0 ♗b7 8 ♘a3 ♘bd7 9 ♖b1 c5?! (Black falls in with White's plans and

allows a favourable b-pawn for c-pawn exchange, while White also gets his knight to the central outpost d4) 10 bxc5 ♘xc5 11 ♘b5 a6 12 ♘bd4 ♖c8 13 f5 and White stood better with play on both sides of the board. Correct is 9...a6, when if White plays the familiar 'chipping' theme of 10 c4 Black earns compensation by opening the long diagonal for his bishop, e.g. 10...dxc4 11 ♘xc4 c5 12 bxc5 b5 13 ♘ce5 ♘xc5 and Black's active pieces balance White's centre pawns.

b) 6...a5 7 b5 a4 (Black got a poor position in another way in B.Larsen-V.Simagin, Moscow 1959: 7...c5 – this only weakens Black's pawns – 8 bxc6 bxc6 9 0-0 ♘bd7 10 ♘a3 ♘e8 11 ♗xg7 ♘xg7 12 ♘d4 ♗b7 13 ♖b1 ♖b8 14 c4 and Black has a bad bishop, is under heavy pressure on the queenside and his king is unsafe) 8 0-0 c6 9 ♘a3 ♗g4 10 c4 e6 11 ♖b1 ♘bd7 12 bxc6 bxc6 13 ♘d4 ♗xe2 14 ♕xe2 ♖c8 15 cxd5 cxd5 16 ♘ab5 ♘e4 17 d3 ♘ec5 18 ♗a3 e5 19 fxe5 ♘xe5 20 ♘a7 ♖c7 21 ♘db5 and White won the exchange and soon the game in B.Ivkov-M.Cuellar Gacharna, Sousse Interzonal 1967.



7 0-0 ♘bd7

7...c6 is Larsen-Spassky, Game 5

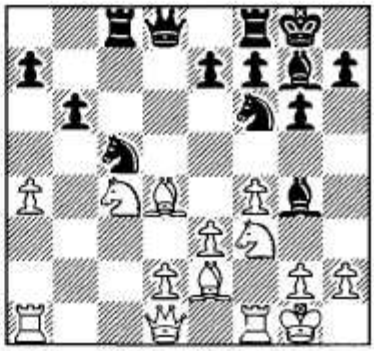
8 c4

White chips away at Black's centre.

8...dxc4 9 ♘a3 c5

Notice that with each pawn exchange White is getting a more central pawn for a further outside pawn. Larsen is a great master of this, and by almost imperceptible means he gradually assumes complete control of the position.

10 bxc5 c3 11 ♗xc3 ♘xc5 12 ♘c4 ♖c8 13 ♗d4 b6 14 a4!



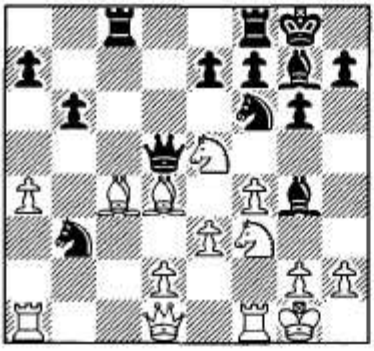
Continuing the theme, and a typical Larsen blow. (One should note this is much more characteristic of his original style than the three ♕e1-h4 games of the previous chapter). Now Bent wants to exchange a-pawn for b-pawn, as he has already traded c-pawn for d-pawn and b-pawn for c-pawn. Finally, he will be left with a rock solid central pawn majority, while Black will be left with a single weak queenside pawn which can probably be picked off – this is exactly what happens in the game.

14...♕d5 15 ♘ce5 ♘b3

Black probably missed White's next move, but even after 15...♘ce4 16 a5!

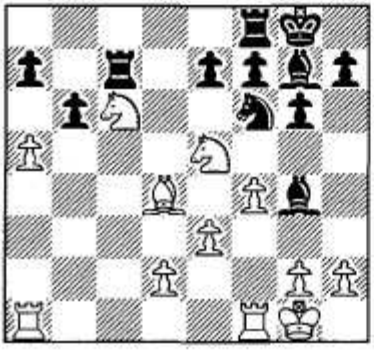
bxa5 White has 17 ♕e1, when d2-d3 will secure a clear plus.

16 ♗c4!



A pretty interference move.

16...♖xc4 17 ♕xb3 ♖c5 18 ♕xd5 ♖xd5 19 ♘c6 ♖d7 20 ♘fe5 ♖c7 21 a5!



Larsen's pawn is on the rampage.

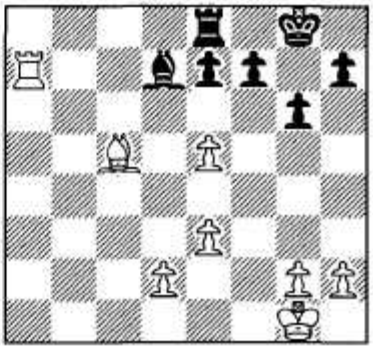
21...bxa5

A somewhat better try is 21...♖fc8, but after 22 axb6 axb6 23 ♘a7 the b-pawn is too vulnerable.

22 ♖xa5

Now Black loses a pawn for nothing, and with a 5-4 pawn majority (instead of the often drawing 4-3) White has excellent winning chances.

22...♗f5 23 ♖xa7 ♖xa7 24 ♗xa7 ♖e8 25 ♗c5 ♗f8 26 ♖a1 ♘d7 27 ♘xd7 ♗xd7 28 ♘e5 ♗g7 29 ♖a7 ♗xe5 30 fxe5 1-0



The opposite-coloured bishops won't save Black, for not only will he soon be two pawns down, but White also has attacking chances, e.g. 30 fxe5 ♗c6 31 ♗xe7 ♖b8 32 ♗f6 h5 33 ♔f2 ♖b2 34 ♖c7 and White wins a piece in view of the mate threat.

As impressive as this game is, one must remember that if Black had played a more solid move order – let's say 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6, or in the actual game (after 1 f4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 e3) if Dely had played 3...c5, there would have been no Bird/Orang-utan. Then the fianchetto would have transposed to the previous game which, as we have already seen, gives White nothing.

Game 17

T.Taylor-C.Salinas

Santa Monica 2003

Before we take a look at this contemporary game, let's consider the classic Bird victory that everyone who plays this

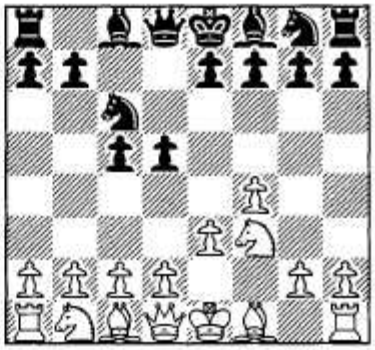
line wants to emulate – A.Nimzowitsch-R.Spielmann, New York 1927: 1 ♘f3 d5 2 b3 c5 3 ♗b2 ♘c6 4 e3 ♘f6 5 ♗b5 ♗d7 6 0-0 e6 7 d3 ♗e7 8 ♘bd2 0-0 9 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 10 ♘e5 ♖c8 11 f4 ♘d7 12 ♕g4 ♘xe5 13 ♗xe5 ♗f6 14 ♖f3 ♗xe5 15 fxe5 ♕c7 16 ♕h5 h6 17 ♖af1 g6 18 ♕xh6 ♕xe5 19 ♖f6 ♕h5 20 ♕xh5 gxh5 21 ♘f3 ♖c7 22 ♖h6 f6 23 ♘h4 ♗e8 24 ♖hxf6 ♖xf6 25 ♖xf6 ♖e7 26 ♔f2 ♔g7 27 ♖f4 ♗d7 28 ♔e2 e5 29 ♖f5 ♖e8 30 ♖f2 e4 31 ♖f4 ♖e5 32 ♔d2 b5 33 g3 ♗h3 34 d4 cxd4 35 exd4 ♖g5 36 c3 a5 37 ♖f2 a4 38 ♔e3 a3 39 ♖c2 ♗f1 40 ♖c1 ♗d3 41 ♘g2 ♖f5 42 ♘f4 ♔f7 43 ♖d1 ♔e7 44 ♘xd3 exd3 45 b4 ♔d6 46 ♔xd3 ♖f2 47 ♖d2 ♖f3+ 48 ♔c2 ♔e6 49 ♖e2+ ♔d6 50 ♔b3 ♖d3 51 ♖e5 h4 52 gxh4 ♖h3 53 ♖h5 ♔c6 54 ♖h6+ ♔b7 55 h5 1-0. What do we see in this game? The exchange of White's bishop on c6 and subsequent domination of e5? The easy recruitment of White's heavy pieces into a kingside attack? A pawn dropping? Or, finally, a good knight versus bad bishop situation setting up the winning ending? All these themes will be seen in the present game, albeit without quite so much elegance!

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 c5

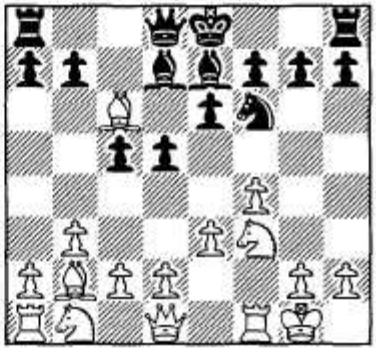
Once again, the immediate 2...g6 is simpler.

3 e3 ♘c6

This is simply a mistake. Perhaps with exact play Black can achieve something close to equality, but White's game is easy and all the pressure is on Black. Although Black has prevented the Bird/Orang-utan, the coming pin will give him headaches of a different kind. Correct (again) is 3...g6, which prevents both of White's dangerous systems.



4 ♗b5 ♗d7 5 b3 ♘f6 6 ♗b2 e6 7 0-0 ♗e7 8 ♗xc6



This trade is the key idea. White exchanges so as to dominate e5, which gives him attacking chances in the middlegame, while looking forward to a good knight versus bad bishop ending further down the road.

8...♗xc6 9 ♘e5 0-0

9...♖c8 is the normal move.

10 d3

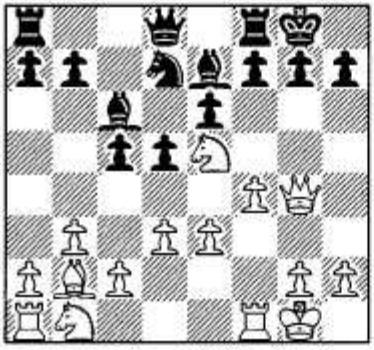
A simple way to get an advantage out of the opening would be 10 ♘xc6 bxc6 11 ♘c3 ♖b8 12 ♘a4 with a small but persistent edge in view of Black's doubled pawns. White can continue with c2-

c4 and ♖c1, while ...d5-d4 is not to be feared as the White's bishop has new prospects on a3.

10...♘d7!?

Black, again, allows doubled pawns. After the normal 10...♖c8 11 ♘d2 we reach Fischer-Mecking, Game 6, by transposition. As I stated in the notes to that game, I think the best is my almost untried recommendation 11...d4. Continuing along that line, as far as I can see, best play might go like this: 12 ♕e2 b6 (12...dxe3 13 ♕xe3 ♘d5 14 ♕g3 ♗f6 15 ♘e4 with a beautiful attacking position for White, or 12...♘d5 13 exd4 cxd4 14 ♗xd4 ♘b4 15 ♗xa7 ♘xc2 16 ♖ac1 ♕a5 17 ♖xc2 ♗d5 18 ♖fc1 ♕xa7+ 19 ♕f2 ♖xc2 20 ♖xc2 ♕a6 when Black has some – but probably not enough – compensation for the pawn) 13 ♘xc6 ♖xc6 14 a4 ♘d5 15 ♘c4 ♘xe3 16 ♘xe3 dxe3 17 ♕xe3 ♗f6 18 ♗e5 and White's control of e5 still gives him a tiny pull.

11 ♕g4?!

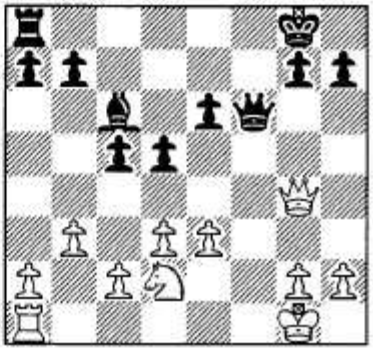


Because Black did not spend a tempo on ...♖c8 White is now a tempo *behind* Fischer-Mecking, and this gives Black enough play to equalize. Since Black did not save his pawn structure, White should take advantage! Best is 11 ♘xc6 bxc6 12 c4 ♗f6 13 ♘c3 ♖e8 14 ♖c1 and White is in front due to the target c-pawns.

11...♘xe5 12 ♗xe5 ♗f6 13 ♘d2 ♗xe5 14 fxe5 f5 15 exf6 ♖xf6 16 ♖xf6

16 ♘f3 ♕c7 17 ♕h5 ♖af8 is equal.

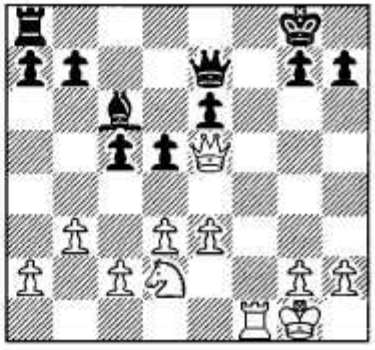
16...♕xf6



17 ♖f1 ♕e5 18 ♕f3 ♕c7

18...h6 is preferable, and it looks like White has practically nothing. But after this error I am able to seize e5 again and successfully continue the opening theme.

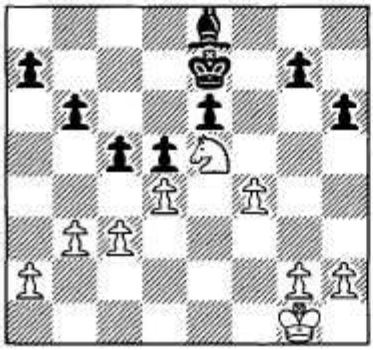
19 ♕h5 ♕e7 20 ♕e5!



Once again, all is right in White's world. This is a typical position that one

should aim for in this line, illustrating how opening strategy (8 ♗xc6!) affects the ending. Black has serious problems on the dark squares, and all minor piece endings favour White.

20...b6 21 ♖f4 ♖f8 22 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 23 ♘f3 h6 24 d4 ♗e8 25 c3 ♕f6 26 ♕b8 ♕f5 27 ♕f4 ♕xf4 28 exf4 ♔e7 29 ♘e5

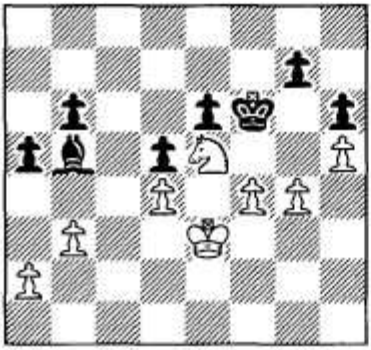


A classic good knight versus bad bishop ending has been reached.

29...cxd4 30 cxd4 ♔f6 31 ♔f2 a5 32 ♔e3 ♔f5 33 g4+ ♔f6 34 h4 ♗b5?

34...h5 is essential, when Black still has drawing chances. After the passive text White ties up Black's kingside.

35 h5!

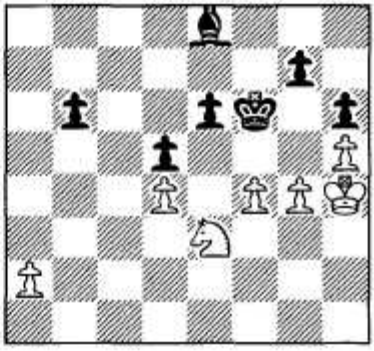


This advance secures a big plus for White.

35...♗e8 36 ♔f3 ♗b5 37 ♔g3 a4 38 bxa4 ♗xa4 39 ♔h4 ♗e8 40 ♘d3 ♗b5 41 ♘e1 ♗a4

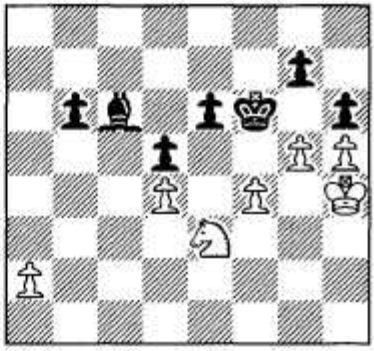
Or 41...♗f1 42 ♘c2 and the knight still reaches the key e3-square.

42 ♘g2 ♗e8 43 ♘e3



The magic square! Now White can attack with g5 without letting the king into f5.

43...♗c6 44 g5+



44...♔e7

Also losing is 44...hxg5+ 45 fxg5+ ♔e7 46 g6! ♔f6 47 ♘g4+ ♔e7 (47...♔f5 48 h6 ♔xg6 49 ♘e5+ and White wins a piece) 48 ♘e5 (returning with a venge-

ance!) 48...♗e8 49 ♔g5, when White's overwhelming positional advantage and kingside pawn majority will force a quick resignation.

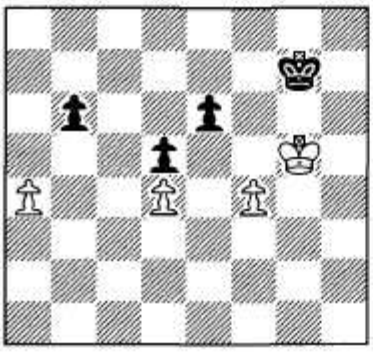
45 gxh6 gxh6 46 ♘g4 ♗b5 47 ♘xh6 ♔f6 48 ♘g4+ ♔f5 49 ♘e5!

The dominating knight returns! This is a forced win, and clearer than playing for the trick 49 ♘e3+, hoping for 49...♔xf4? 50 h6 ♗d3 51 ♘g2+ which wins at once – unfortunately Black would play 49...♔f6 and could still resist.

49...♗e8

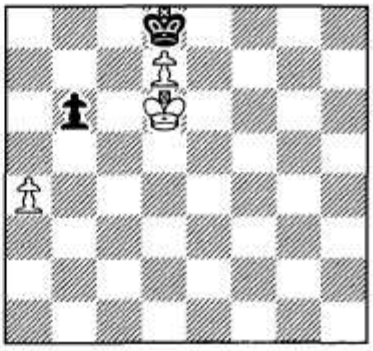
The coming pawn ending is lost, but after 49...♗a4 50 h6 ♔f6 51 h7 ♔g7 52 ♔g5 ♗c2 53 h8♕+ ♔xh8 54 ♔f6 ♗f5 55 ♘d7 b5 56 ♘c5 all the pawns drop.

50 h6 ♗g6 51 ♘xg6 ♔xg6 52 h7 ♔xh7 53 ♔g5 ♔g7 54 a4!



The final zugzwang position of the game can now be foreseen. Black loses due to his poor king position and lack of pawn tempos.

54...♔f7 55 f5 ♔e7 56 fxe6 ♔xe6 57 ♔g6 ♔e7 58 ♔f5 ♔d6 59 ♔f6 ♔d7 60 ♔e5 ♔c6 61 ♔e6 ♔c7 62 ♔xd5 ♔d7 63 ♔e5 ♔e7 64 d5 ♔d7 65 d6 ♔d8 66 ♔e6 ♔e8 67 d7+ ♔d8 68 ♔d6



68...b5 69 a5! 1-0

Black resigns in view of mate in three: 69...b4 70 a6 b3 71 a7 b2 72 a8♕ mate.

The lesson of this game is *avoid this line with Black*! Although White's play was slightly inaccurate, Black never had better than 'near equality' and was always under pressure. Meanwhile, White has a simple and pleasant game, with many plans such as direct attack, double pawn exploitation or the superior minor piece ending seen both in the main game and also in the accompanying Nimzowitsch-Spielmann classic.

Game 18

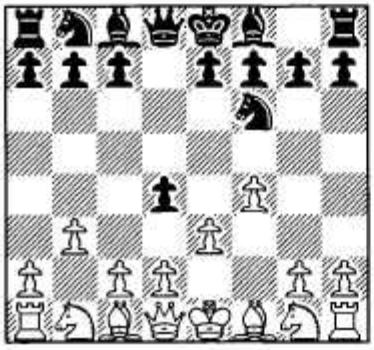
A.Nimzowitsch-L.Steiner

Kecskemet 1927

1 f4 d5 2 e3 ♘f6 3 b3

The question this move asks is can White go directly to the queen's Fianchetto without developing any other piece?' – in particular, can White safely play this way without developing his king's knight, which would control the advancing square of Black's centre pawn?

3...d4!



Black advances, cracks White's pawn structure and firmly answers 'No!' One recalls the classic encounter Lasker-Bauer (Game 3) in which the world champion also played this way with White, and his opponent, suitably terrified, answered with the quiet ...e7-e6. Steiner was not so fearful of his famous opponent!

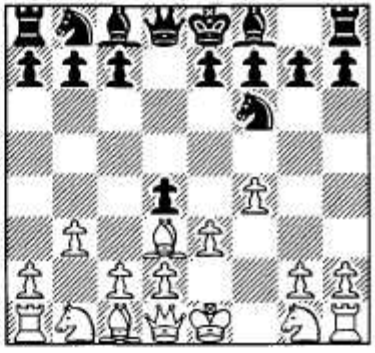
How can White answer this bold advance? The computer, our eager Fritz 8, already gives a slight advantage to Black! Database statistics are equally cheery – in the 'Big Database' we find 19 games with this position: 4 wins for White, 7 draws, and 8 losses! One certainly does not want to be in this difficult a position with White on move 4!

4 ♗d3

After considerable analysis I have to agree with the computer. White is already suffering. The fact is that Black had an immediate threat in 4...dxe3 and a subsequent queen exchange, which would leave White's king exposed. I think Nimzowitsch's move is the best of several possible choices, but it nevertheless doesn't look like *White* can even equalize!

First, one should note that White can neither bypass the enemy pawn, as e4 is not defended, nor trade, as 4 exd4 ♕xd4 wins material for Black.

The most natural and consistent 4 ♗b2 leads to either a poor ending or a dubious gambit. Black plays 4...dxe3 5 ♕e2 (5 dxe3 ♕xd1+ 6 ♔xd1 ♘g4 7 ♔e2 ♘c6 is one of those 'let's pray for a draw' situations) and now instead of the weak 5...e6 of R.Nicolli-J.Choyke, Detroit 1994, Black should fearlessly take the pawn with 5...exd2+ 6 ♘xd2 ♕d6 and White's compensation is either inadequate or – more likely – not there at all. White can also try 4 ♘f3 dxe3 5 ♗c4 (another dubious gambit, but the alternatives are no fun either: 5 dxe3 ♕d1+ and Black has an easy plus, or 5 d4 ♘d5 and it's not so easy to get the pawn back) 5...exd2+ 6 ♘bxd2 e6 7 ♕e2 ♘c6 8 ♗b2 ♗d6 9 ♘e5 ♗d7 10 0-0-0 ♕e7 11 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 12 ♗xg7 ♖g8 13 ♗c3 ♗xf4 and Black consolidated the extra material and went on to win in F.Mueller-A.Szeberenyi, Budapest 2000.

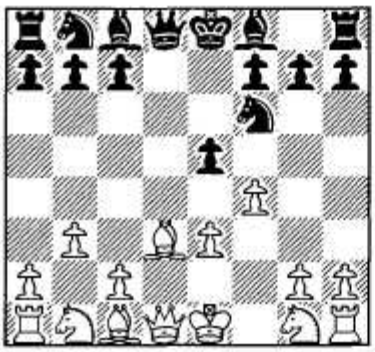


4...dxe3

Black has a luxury of choice. 4...♘c6 5 ♘f3 ♘b4 6 ♕e2 (6 ♘xd4 ♘xd3+ 7 cxd3

c5 8 ♘f3 ♕xd3 is similar, with the same type of plus for Black) 6...dxe3 7 dxe3 ♘xd3+ with a simple two bishops advantage for Black, R.Nicevski-S.Smagin, Amantea 1994.

5 dxe3 e5!

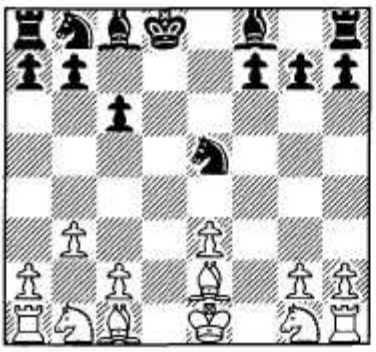


This thrust is the sharpest, but even 5...♘bd7 followed by ...♘c5 is good for Black

6 fxe5 ♘g4 7 ♗b5+

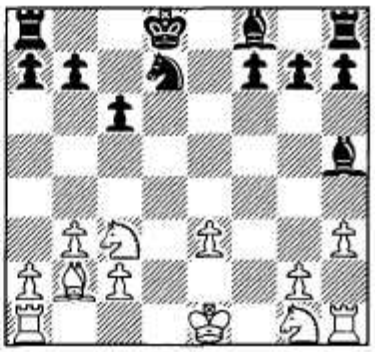
It would be even worse to give up the other pawn as after 7 ♗b2 ♘xe3 8 ♕e2 ♕g5 9 g3 ♗c5 White's king is caught in the centre.

7...c6 8 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9 ♗e2 ♘xe5



I'm not sure where White's play could be improved (unless you want to go all the way back to 3 ♘f3! instead of 3 b3), but the fact of the matter is that a very strong Bird expert is struggling badly with White as early as the 9th move!

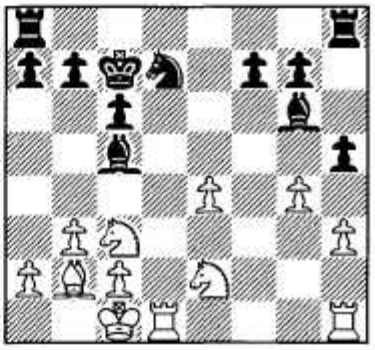
10 ♗b2 ♘g4 11 ♗xg4 ♗xg4 12 ♘c3 ♘d7 13 h3 ♗h5



14 g4 ♗g6 15 0-0-0 ♗c5

Black has the two bishops and a target at e3.

16 e4 ♔c7 17 ♘ge2 h5!



Black opens lines, taking advantage of the fact that 18 g5? drops the g-pawn to ...♗e3+.

18 ♘g3 hxg4 19 hxg4 ♘f6 20 ♘f5 ♘xg4

Capturing with a threat to f2. The contest is decided.

21 ♘a4 ♖xh1 22 ♖xh1 ♗f8 23 ♖g1 ♘f2 24 ♘h4 ♗h5 25 ♖f1 ♘xe4 26 ♘c3 ♘g3 27 ♖g1 ♗d6 28 ♔b1 g5 0-1

The situation is hopeless. What a crush!

As I mentioned earlier, this was Nimzowitsch's only loss with the Bird. This makes me run in the opposite direction (I have *never* played this move order) but, as the statistics show, for some strange reason there are White players still losing with this line today! Don't you be one of them...

Summary

Move order is critical in the queen's Fianchetto variation. If Black allows a Bird/Orang-utan (Game 16) or a pin on his knight (Game 17), then the fianchetto development is strong, and White has chances for advantage. However, if Black plays accurately, as seen in Blatny-Fridman (Game 15), then White can execute neither of these effective developments, and the chance of a White edge drops down to zilch, while trying for more is asking for trouble.

White should only play this line against a good player if a draw is an acceptable result. Finally, the move order 1 f4 d5 2 e3 ♘f6 3 b3 can be considered refuted by 3...d4! No improvement has been found in over seventy years, either by human or computer – evidently White is already somewhat worse, and the practical results bear out this gloomy but accurate evaluation.

CHAPTER THREE

The Recipe: Black Plays an Early ...♗g4

Here we deal with the following Black set-up: 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 e3 ♗g4, when Black intends to follow with ...♘bd7, ...♗xf3, and ...e7-e5. I call this chapter The Recipe since I have many times seen, in general opening books, this line extolled as a simple way to meet the Bird. Authors of such general works, aimed at weaker players, always view the non-developing, king-exposing Bird disparagingly. Given that prejudice, they seem to think that just a little manoeuvre can give Black the better game in the opening! Of course that kind of optimism is a bit misplaced, and what I find rather humorous is that, far from being simple, this variation contains some of the sharpest and most unclear of all Bird lines.

Essentially White has three methods of counter-cooking the recipe. First is to play positionally – after the above moves White develops calmly: 4 ♗e2 ♘bd7 5 0-0 ♗xf3 6 ♗xf3 e5 and then comes the break in the centre with 7 d4. This will be seen in Game 19, Larsen-Smailbegovic. Black does get a playable game but White should keep at least a small positional advantage.

In Game 20, Ferreira-Damaso, I show that White must also be careful. If White thinks he can play by the rules and capture toward the centre (7 fxe5 instead of Larsen's 7 d4) he may run into difficulties, as Black will have good central and kingside play. The second main line against the recipe is the original main line, 5 ♘e5, where White mechanically blocks the e5-square. This is what Larsen used to beat Petrosian (Game 4) but, as the reader will recall, Petrosian stood better in the early stages. After trying the line a couple of times myself, I conclude this gives White at best equality. Game 21, Taylor-Ibragimov, shows the correct ideas for Black, and also spotlights the inaccuracies which were actually played.

Finally, we come to my favourite game in the whole book: the stunning, original, brilliant and absolutely bizarre Danielsen-Luther crush (Game 22). The Danish Grandmaster Henrik Danielsen

has followed in his compatriot Larsen's footsteps to become the greatest exponent of the Bird among contemporary grandmasters. In this violent encounter with a fellow 2500+ GM (and in his previous old style smack-down of Salmensuu, given in full in the notes to the game) Danielsen attempts to simply wipe the recipe off the board with a fiery kingside pawn storm! This idea actually originated with Nimzowitsch, but Danielsen takes it to new heights of accelerated brilliance – or madness!

The razor sharp line, featuring a bayonet attack as early as the sixth move, should make any player in Black's shoes pause before thinking he has an easy equalizer!

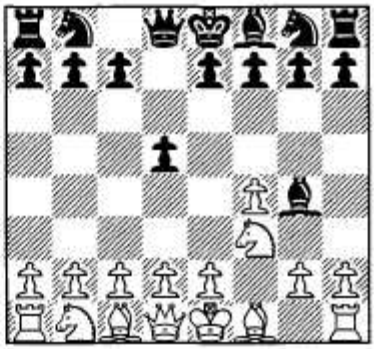
Game 19

B.Larsen-H.Smailbegovic

Sarajevo 1960

Before we get to the main game, I have to include a Dutch win (with Larsen playing Black) that impressed me enormously as a young player. This is L.Piasetski-B.Larsen, St John 1970: 1 ♘f3 f5 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♗g5 e6 4 ♘bd2 ♗e7 5 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 6 e4 0-0 7 ♗d3 d5 8 exf5 exf5 9 0-0 ♘c6 10 c3 ♕d6 11 ♕c2 g6 12 ♖fe1 ♗d7 13 ♘b3 b6 14 ♖e2 ♖ae8 15 ♖ae1 ♖e4! (my eyes opened wide at this casual offer of the rook) 16 ♗xe4 fxe4 17 ♘fd2 ♗h4 18 ♘f1 ♘d8 19 c4 c6 20 ♘e3 ♘e6 21 ♖f1 ♗d8 22 ♖d1 ♘f4 23 ♖ee1 ♗c7 24 ♘f1 ♗g4 25 ♖d2 ♘xg2! 26 ♖e3 (26 ♔xg2 ♗f3+ 27 ♔g1 ♕d7 28 ♖e3 ♕g4+ 29 ♘g3 ♕h3 and mates) 26...♘xe3 27 fxe3 ♕f6 28 ♖f2 ♗f3 29 ♘g3 ♕h4 0-1. I never forgot this game, but it was not until I was researching this book that I discovered that Larsen had already used the opening idea (7...d5, above) ten years before, with an extra tempo, in the game given below!

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♗g4



Black could reach the game position in a calmer way by playing 2...♘f6 3 e3 ♗g4. By developing the bishop immediately he risks some extremely zany and unexplored variations!

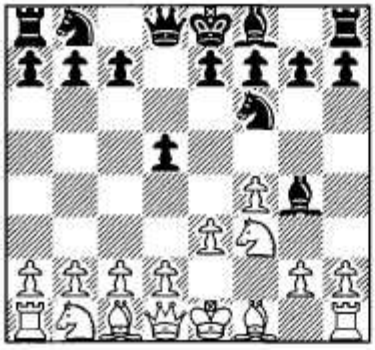
3 e3

The normal move, but White could try 3 ♘e5!? ♗f5 (3...♗h5 looks risky but is playable, as the Basmanian g2-g4 is met by the resource ...f7-f6!) 4 c4 with a well-known position from the Trompowsky (1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♗g5 ♘e4 3 ♗f4 c5) with reversed colours and the extra move f2-f4! I have found exactly one(!) game in the database with this line, but it is certainly worth exploring. That game continued 4...dxc4 5 ♘a3 ♘d7 6 ♘axc4 with approximate equality, R.Henley-W.Martz, Lone Pine 1977.

3...♘f6

Black can push for an even quicker ...e7-e5 with 3...♘d7, which has already been seen in Game 7, Kramnik-

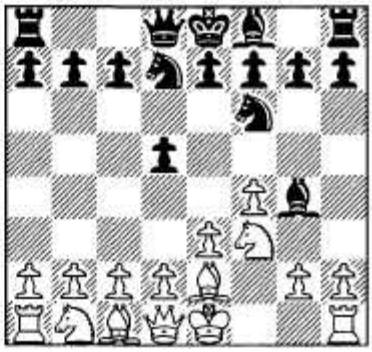
Oratovsky. This specific move order will be fully analyzed in Game 22, Danielsen-Luther. 3...♘c6 has also been tried but looks inaccurate. Black is playing a known anti-Dutch system (1 d4 f5 2 ♘c3 ♘f6 3 ♗g5) but the extra tempo completely nullifies its effectiveness. In the Dutch line given above, Black must either allow e2-e4 (after 3...e6) or accept doubled pawns (after 3...d5). In the present position, White stops both threats with 4 d4, entering a good Stonewall where Black's queen's knight is obviously completely misplaced. A high level game between GMs explains it all to us: 4 d4 e6 5 ♗e2 ♘ce7 (Black can't think of anything to do with his c6-knight, so moves it away from the wall) 6 c4 c6 7 ♘c3 ♘f5 (the knight continues to wander) 8 0-0 ♘f6 9 ♕b3 ♕b6 10 ♗d3 dxc4 11 ♕xc4 ♗xf3 12 ♖xf3 ♖d8 13 ♘a4 ♕c7 14 ♕c2 g6 15 ♗d2 ♗g7 16 ♘c5 and White had a clear advantage with his strong knight, two bishops and superior centre, although it took him 86 moves to win in V.Malaniuk-S.Sulskis, Swidnica 1998.



4 ♗e2

The positional move. The razor sharp variations with 4 h3 will be covered in the notes to Game 22.

4...♘bd7



The point of the 'recipe' – Black is ready to take on f3 and play ...e7-e5, and he doesn't fear the wall with his knight soundly placed on d7 (5 d4 can be well met with the immediate 5...c5).

5 0-0

I think this quiet move (allowing Black to cook up his recipe) is the best in this particular position, as the ...e7-e5 advance does not solve all of Black's problems, and he must give White the bishop pair in the process. 5 ♘e5 has long been considered the main line, but as I mentioned in my notes to Larsen-Petrosian, Game 4, I don't think this gives Black any trouble (for further analysis see Taylor-Ibragimov, Game 21).

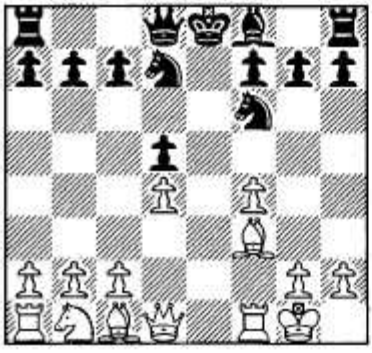
5...♗xf3 6 ♗xf3 e5 7 d4

This looks best. White forces Black to come to a decision in the centre. For the weaker 7 fxe5, which activates Black's pieces, see the next game (and note that the quiet 7 d3 gives Black no problems after 7...♗d6).

7...e4

Now White gets a good reversed French in which his initiative comes quickly on the queenside, while Black's play is slowed by the white bulwark on f4 (courtesy of the first move!). No better is 7...exf4 as this seemingly reasonable exchange allows White a neat strategical twist, namely 8 ♘c3! c6 9 e4! and White has magically transformed the position into a highly favourable King's Gambit Accepted!

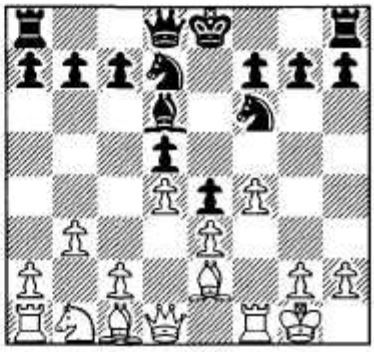
Critical is 7...exd4! 8 exd4 when it is difficult to prove an advantage in this Exchange French style position.



After 8...♗e7 9 c4 White can endeavour to open the game for the bishops: 9...c6 10 cxd5 (10 ♘c3?! dxc4, or 10 b3 0-0 11 ♘c3 ♗b4 12 ♘e2 ♖e8 13 ♘g3 ♕c7 with equality) 10...♘xd5 11 ♘c3 ♘7f6 12 ♕b3 ♕d7 13 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 14 ♗xd5 cxd5 15 f5 0-0 16 ♗f4 ♖fe8 and the game peters out to nothing. White can also open his queen's bishop's diagonal quickly, 9 ♘c3 ♘b6 10 ♕d3 0-0 11 f5 hoping for an attack, but this does not really generate long-term play. Here is an excellent example of Black solidity and counterattack: 11...c6 12 ♗g5 h6 13 ♗h4 ♘h7 14 ♗f2 ♘g5 15 ♗e2 ♘c4 16 h4 ♘h7 17 ♕h3 ♗b4 18 ♗xc4 dxc4 19 a3 ♗xc3 20 ♕xc3 ♕d5 21 ♖ae1 ♕xf5 22 ♖e5 ♕d7 23 ♕xc4 ♘f6 24 ♖fe1 ♖fe8 25 ♕e2 ♖xe5 26 dxe5 ♖e8 27 ♗xa7 ♘g4 28 ♕d1 ♖xe5 29 c4 h5 30 ♖f1 ♕c7 31 ♗d4 ♖e4 32 ♖f3 ♕d6 33 ♖d3 ♖xd4! and 0-1 as the queen falls after 34 ♖d4 ♕h2+ and 35...♘e3+, D.Feofanov-V.Yemelin, St Petersburg 2004.

So how should White play? The alert reader will recall Piasetski-Larsen, given at the top of this game. White should play according to Larsen's Dutch treatment, with an extra move. For example, 9 ♘c3 ♘b6 10 ♕d3 0-0 11 b3 ♖e8 12 ♗d2 c6 13 ♖ae1 ♕c7 14 ♘d1 and White's idea is ♘f2, c2-c3 and ♗d1-c2 with an attacking position, keeping ♖e5 in reserve. In this way I believe White retains chances of a long-term advantage.

8 ♗e2 ♗d6 9 b3!

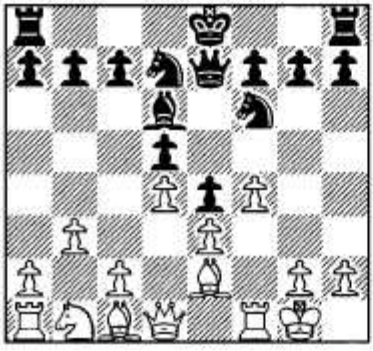


The purpose of this move is not to fianchetto the bishop, rather it has everything to do with the centre (remember Larsen loves to capture towards the centre!). White plans 10 c4, and now he can answer ...dxc4 with bxc4 and have an

excellent game – but if Bent had impatiently played 9 c4 then Black would seize d5 as follows: 9...dxc4 10 ♗xc4 ♘b6 and Black is at least equal.

9...♕e7

If Black goes for an immediate kingside attack White can combine his queenside advance with kingside defence and come out on top, e.g. 9...h6 10 c4 (note that 10 ♗a3?! is incorrect as White's so-called bad bishop often carries out important defensive functions in this position, like holding f4, while this too dogmatic exchange also loses time – Black plays 10...♗xa3 11 ♘xa3 0-0 12 c4 ♕e7 13 ♕c1 c6 14 c5 b6 15 b4 a5 with counterplay) 10...c6 11 c5 ♗c7 12 b4 a6 13 a4 g5 14 ♖a3! (putting the rook on a protected square while also patrolling the third rank) 14...gxf4 15 exf4 ♖g8 16 b5 and White's threats are more dangerous than Black's kingside demonstration (and where is the black king going to live?).



10 c4 c6 11 ♘c3 0-0

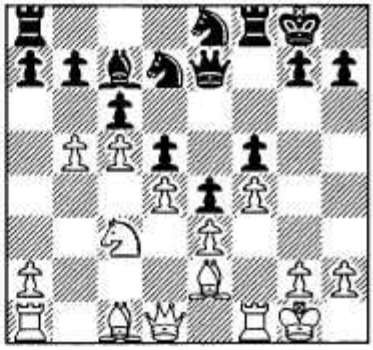
In P.Monte-A.Abolianin, Vlissingen 1995, Black tried 11...a6 but the pawn attack cannot be stopped. After 12 ♗d2 h5 13 ♖b1 g6 14 c5 ♗c7 15 b4 ♔f8 16 a4 ♔g7 17 b5 axb5 18 axb5 ♘g8 19 bxc6 bxc6 20 ♖b7 White broke through to the seventh rank with a big advantage.

12 c5 ♗c7 13 b4

White's queenside play is clearly quicker than Black's hoped for kingside attack.

13...♘e8 14 b5 f5

Now White's advantage is simply overwhelming, with Black playing too solidly and slowly to make a difference. Personally, I would have recognized it was desperation time and hurled out 14...g5!?, forcing White to find 15 bxc6! (15 ♕a4?! gxf4 16 bxc6 f3 17 cxd7 ♕h4 18 h3 ♘f6 19 ♗d2 fxg2 and White's kingside is destroyed) 15...bxc6 (15...gxf4 16 ♘xd5 forks the house) 16 ♕a4 gxf4 17 ♕xc6 f3 18 ♗xf3 exf3 19 ♘xd5 ♕d8 20 ♖xf3 with three pawns and an attack.

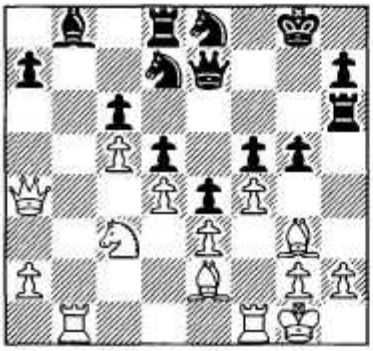


15 ♗d2 ♖f6

It's too late for 15...g5 now due to 16 bxc6 bxc6 17 ♕a4 ♕e6 18 fxg5 f4 19 exf4 e3 20 f5 ♖xf5 (20...♕e7 21 ♕xc6 with too many threats) 21 ♖xf5 ♕xf5 22 ♗xe3 and White has two extra pawns and the better position.

16 ♕b3 ♖d8 17 ♕a4 ♗b8 18 bxc6 bxc6 19 ♖ab1 ♖h6 20 ♗e1 g5 21

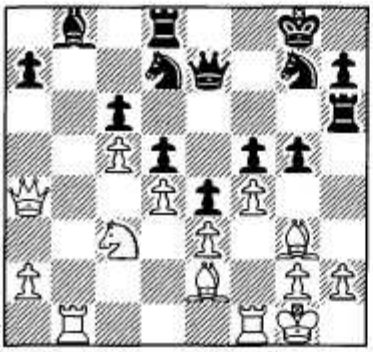
♗g3



One should note again the important role of the bad bishop – White secures his kingside.

21...♘g7

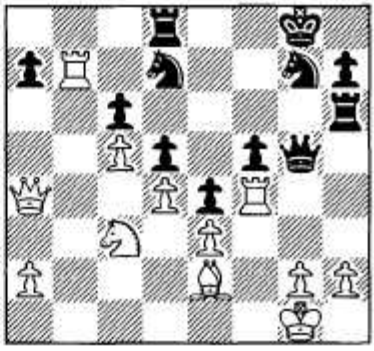
After 21...gxf4 22 ♗xf4 ♗xf4 23 ♖xf4 Black has loose pawns at f5 and a7.



22 ♖b7

This is good enough, but on another day Bent would probably have finished elegantly with 22 fxg5 ♕xg5 23 ♖xb8!, when Black has two ways to lose. After 23...♘xb8 24 ♗f4 ♕h4 25 ♕xa7 White will recover the exchange with an extra pawn and a dominating position, while 23...♖xb8 24 ♗f4 ♕f6 25 ♗xb8 ♘xb8 26 ♕xa7 ♕d8 27 ♕b6 ♕e8 (the exchange of queens is hopeless) 28 ♘xd5! (crunch!) 28...♘d7 29 ♕a6 ♘b8 30 ♘c7! sees White keep both extra pawns.

22...gxf4 23 ♗xf4 ♗xf4 24 ♖xf4 ♕g5



25 ♕xa7?

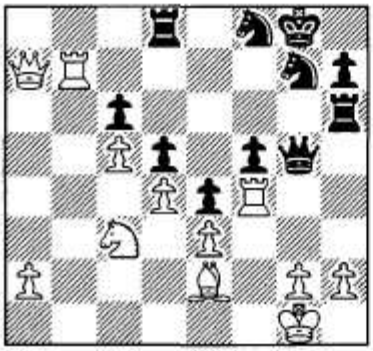
White's logical play has led to a winning position. A centre pawn is en prise and there are few things the great Dane likes better than loose centre pawns, but due to some chess blindness he takes the inoffensive a-pawn, presenting Black with counterplay. Of course 25 ♘xd5! is correct, winning in all variations:

a) 25...cxd5 26 ♖xd7 and White has a passed pawn and crushing threats.

b) 25...♘xc5 26 ♘e7+ ♕xe7 27 ♕c4+ ♕e6 28 ♕xc5 ♔h8 29 ♗c4 ♕d6 30 ♕xd6 ♖hxd6 31 ♖xa7 with a good extra pawn and the superior minor piece.

c) 25...♘e6 26 ♖xf5 ♕h4 27 h3 ♕e1+ 28 ♗f1 cxd5 29 ♖xd7 ♖f8 30 ♖xf8+ ♘xf8 31 ♖xd5 ♖f6 32 ♕c4 ♕xe3+ 33 ♔h1 ♔h8 (33...♕e1? 34 ♖g5+ ♔h8 35 ♖g8 mate) 34 ♕e2 ♕f4 35 ♔g1 ♘e6 36 c6 e3 37 ♕e1 ♖g6 (37...♘xd4 38 c7) 38 ♗d3 and now Black's tricks are over but White's two extra pawns are still very much alive.

25...♘f8



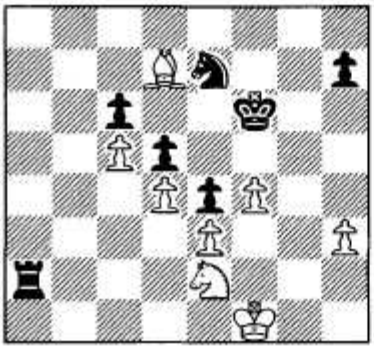
26 ♖b8

No better is 26 ♖f2 ♘ge6 27 ♖b3 f4 with attack, as White's kingside bulwark has broken down.

26...♖xb8 27 ♕xb8 ♘ge6

White must sacrifice the exchange and play for a draw because 28 ♖f2 ♕xe3 favours Black.

28 g3 ♘xf4 29 ♕xf4 ♕xf4 30 gxf4 ♖g6+ 31 ♔f2 ♖g7 32 ♗f1 ♖b7 33 ♗h3 ♖b2+ 34 ♘e2 ♖xa2 35 ♗xf5 ♔g7 36 ♔f1 ♔f6 37 ♗c8 ♘g6 38 h3 ♘e7 39 ♗d7 ½-½



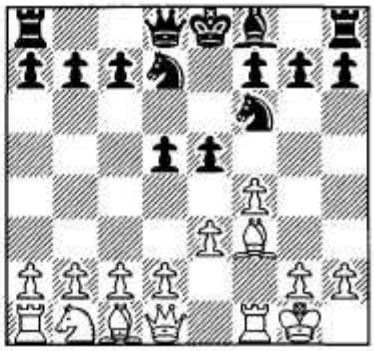
The strong bishop and extra pawn give White play but it's not clear that he has sufficient compensation for the exchange. Black could play on, e.g. 39...♔f7 40 ♘g3 ♖a7 41 ♗g4 ♖a3 42 ♔f2 ♖a1 43 ♗d7 ♖a8 44 f5 ♖d8 and White is under great pressure as his bishop must lose contact with c6. But Smailbegovic instead takes the safe draw against his higher ranked opponent. Larsen was clearly off form in this game, missing two wins – the elegant 22 fxg5 and the simple 25 ♘d5. But that aside, there is instructional value galore in his opening strategy, both in the main game and (with reversed colours) in Piasetski-Larsen.

Game 20

A.Ferreira-R.Damaso

Portugal 1993

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♗g4 3 e3 ♘d7 4 ♗e2 ♘gf6 5 0-0 ♗xf3 6 ♗xf3 e5



7 fxe5

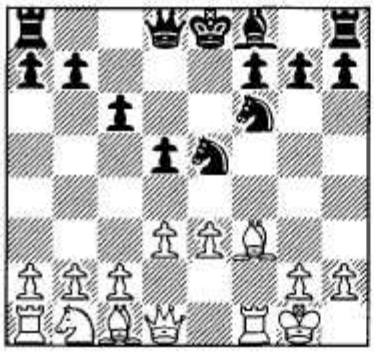
This seems natural. White trades his f-pawn for a centre pawn, which is normally good, but other factors come into play. Black gets a centralized knight and the b8-h2 diagonal is weakened. The position reminds me of an Open Sicilian, with Black having a typical 'White' struc-

ture – here Black can attack the white king, which (analogous to the Sicilian) would be safer on the other side of the board. It is possible that Black is already slightly better here.

7...♘xe5 8 d3

If White doesn't pay attention to his king the following disaster could occur: 8 b3 c6 9 ♗b2 ♕c7 10 ♗e2 ♗d6 11 c4 ♘ed7 12 h3 ♘e4 and Black has a huge advantage in the shape of the kingside attack. Note that Black is ready to castle queenside in many lines.

8...c6



9 ♘d2

9 ♘c3 ♗c5 10 ♔h1 ♕e7 and White's centre is under restraint, e.g. 11 d4 ♘xf3 or 11 e4 d4. Nevertheless, White has to do something or Black will simply build up an attack.

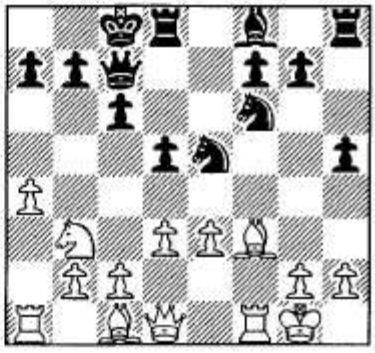
9...♕c7 10 ♘b3

This is too slow. White should go ahead and advance in the centre with 10 e4 (he's never going to get a better time). Black keeps an edge with 10...♘xf3+ 11 ♕xf3 ♗d6 12 h3 0-0 13 exd5 cxd5 14 c3 a5 with superior development and activity, while White is still struggling to disentangle the queenside. 12...0-0-0 is risky because of White's pressure on the f-file: 13 exd5 ♘xd5 (13...cxd5 14 ♘b3 with the idea of ♗g5, and White has play) 14 ♕xf7 ♗c5+ 15 ♔h1 ♕xf7 16 ♖xf7 ♘b4 17 ♘e4 and White disentangles, still holding the extra pawn. Nonetheless, White should have taken this chance, as at least by advancing the e-pawn he gets some play and forces Black to castle on the same side, thus avoiding the attack seen in the game.

10...0-0-0

Now there is no doubt that Black is clearly better, and it's only the tenth move! Black's plan of ...h7-h5 and ...♘g4 is self-evident and strong, while White has no equivalent way to bother the black king.

11 a4 h5



There is a big difference in the threats posed by these rook pawns.

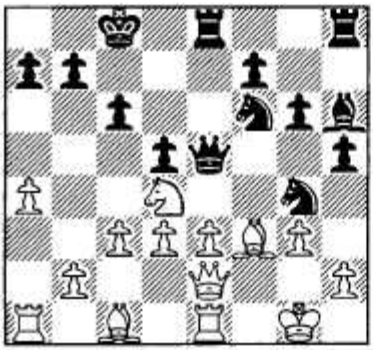
12 ♘d4 ♘eg4

White has brought a knight to the centre, but Black suddenly threatens mate in one!

13 g3 ♖e8 14 ♕e2 ♕e5 15 ♖e1 g6 16 c3 ♗h6

Black piles up on the backward e-pawn (now White must really wish he

had pushed that pawn to e4).



17 e4?!

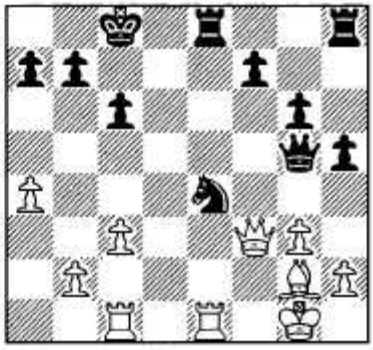
Too late – this serves only to create an even weaker isolani. Though difficult psychologically, White had to simply dig in with 17 ♘c2.

17...♗xc1 18 ♖axc1 ♕g5 19 ♗g2 dxe4 20 dxe4 ♘e5 21 ♘f3 ♘xf3+ 22 ♕xf3?

White blunders under pressure. After the better 22 ♗xf3 ♘d7 (intending ...♘e5) Black has the superior minor piece, a good blockade of White's isolani and attacking chances that can be quelled only by a queen exchange, leaving White in a poor ending. However, Black would still have to win it, and as Larsen says, 'stubborn defence sometimes saves a half point' – but White, discouraged by the way the whole game has gone (being clearly worse so early), doesn't notice that now his e-pawn is hanging.

22...♘xe4!

But Black does. The petite combination works because of White's loose rook on c1, and because White's queen obstructs the bishop. The rest requires no comment.



23 ♖cd1 ♕c5+ 24 ♖d4 ♘g5 25 ♕f2 ♖xe1+ 26 ♕xe1 ♖d8 27 ♕e3 ♘e6 28 ♗h3 ♖xd4 29 cxd4 ♕d5 30 a5 f5

This would be a good place to resign, but White gets around to it soon enough!

31 ♗g2 ♕xd4 32 ♕xd4 ♘xd4 33 ♔f2 a6 34 ♗f1 ♔d7 35 ♗c4 ♘e6 36 h4 ♔d6 37 ♔e3 ♔e5 0-1

This game is a rather drastic demonstration of how Larsen's 7 d4 is much better than the seemingly natural 7 fxe5.

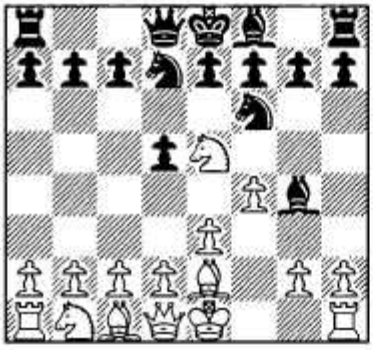
Game 21

T.Taylor-I.Ibragimov

Las Vegas 2004

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♗g4 3 e3 ♘f6 4 ♗e2 ♘bd7 5 ♘e5

For many years this was considered the main line of this variation. For example, ChessBase gives us thirteen games with this position, as opposed to only five for the superior 5 0-0 ♗xf3 6 ♗xf3 e5 7 d4 of Game 19. However, both these lines are being superseded by Danielsen's super sharp 4 h3 (fifteen games in the database, one of which will be given next).



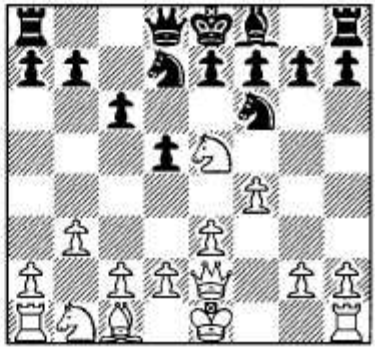
5...♗xe2 6 ♕xe2

As I mentioned in my notes to Larsen-Petrosian, Game 4, I don't think White has any advantage in this position and might even stand worse! First, White has exchanged his good bishop; second, the 'strong' knight at e5 can't be maintained. Although I scored 1½/2 against a GM and a high rated master with this move, I would not play it again.

6...c6

This is inaccurate. Best is Petrosian's 6...e6, when White has a hard time even equalizing. We already know 7 0-0 ♗d6 8 d4 is the bad Stonewall of Larsen-Petrosian, Game 4. Exchanging the knight doesn't help, either – if instead of 8 d4 White plays 8 ♘xd7, then 8...♕xd7 9 d3 0-0-0 10 e4 dxe4 11 dxe4 ♕c6 leaves Black ahead, with a lead in development and attacking chances. I tried to improve in T.Taylor-J.Banawa, Westwood Winter Open, Los Angeles (rapidplay) 2005 with 7 b3 and got the better game after 7...♗d6?! 8 ♗b2 c6 9 d3 ♕c7 10 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 (10...♕xd7 11 ♘d2 0-0 12 0-0 ♕e7 13 ♘f3 with a slight plus for White) 11 ♗xg7 ♖g8 12 ♗b2 0-0-0 13 ♘d2 e5 14 f5!, when Black had nothing concrete for the pawn. However, this whole line is meaningless, as Black has a major improvement with 7...♘xe5 (closing the door on White's bishop, which became so strong in the Banawa game) 8 fxe5 ♘d7 9 ♗b2 (alternatives are no better, e.g. 9 d4 ♕h4+ 10 g3 ♕h3 and Black certainly has no problems, or 9 0-0 ♘xe5 10 ♕b5+ c6 11 ♕xb7 ♕b8 12 ♕a6 ♕b5 13 ♕xb5 cxb5 and Black has the better ending) 9...♕h4+ 10 ♕f2 (worse is 10 g3 ♕e4) ♕f2+ 11 ♔f2 and White can hope only to draw the ending with his inferior bishop.

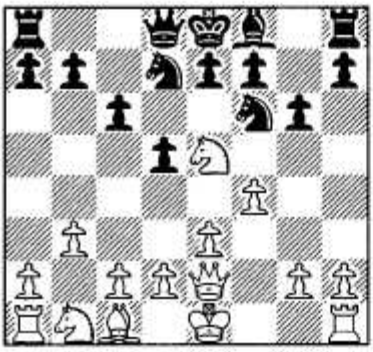
7 b3



7...g6?!

A mistake similar to Banawa's 7...♗d6. In both cases Black allows White to 'connect' his bishop to his good knight. Now White is slightly better. Instead, as above, Black should chop with 7...♘xe5 8 fxe5 ♘d7 9 ♗b2 (or 9 d4 e6 10 0-0 ♗e7 11 c3 0-0 12 e4 ♘b6 13 ♘d2 c5 14 ♘f3 ♖c8 15 ♗b2 cxd4 16 cxd4 dxe4 17 ♕xe4 ♕d5 and White's bad bishop and the hole on d5 left Black better in R.Brauner-H.Haeusler, Bundesliga 1980) 9...e6 10 0-0 ♕g5 11 ♖f4 ♗e7 (11...♘xe5?? 12 h4) 12 d3 f6 13 exf6

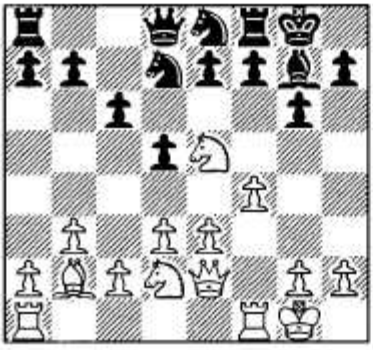
gxf6 14 ♘d2 ♗d6 15 ♖f2 0-0-0, and I like Black's attacking chances.



8 ♗b2

A move ago this piece was about to be relegated to 'bad' status, blocked by a pawn of its own colour. Now it proudly supports the flagship knight and has become good.

8...♗g7 9 0-0 0-0 10 d3 ♘e8 11 ♘d2



Black's two successive inaccuracies (6...c6 and 7...g6) have led to this position, a queen's Fianchetto variation that favours White. This is because the pawn now on c6 belongs on c5 so that ...d5-d4 can be threatened, and to that end the knight on d7 belongs on c6. Meanwhile, White has lined up his forces correctly and is ready to either dominate e5 with ♘df3 or to advance e3-e4 with the conventionally favourable pawn structure. It is interesting that a high-rated GM (due to careless handling of his defence against the Bird) should already be worse, and in just a few more moves he will be effectively lost! I have always done well against GMs with the Bird, and I think the reason is simple – they just don't respect the opening, and because they don't respect it, they haven't studied it, so inaccuracies creep into their play quite early.

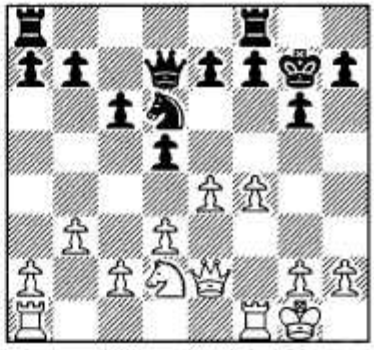
11...♘d6 12 ♘xd7

I decide to go for the e3-e4 advance, but also possible is 12 ♘df3, holding e5 with a steady edge.

12...♕xd7

Not 12...♗xb2? 13 ♘xf8 ♗xa1 14 ♘xg6 and White wins a pawn.

13 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 14 e4



14...♖ad8?

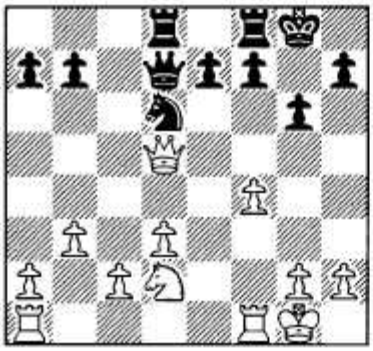
14...dxe4 15 dxe4 ♘b5 16 ♘f3 is a lesser evil, with White's now familiar favourable pawn structure. White gets attacking chances and superior central control but this is still preferable to the

game.

15 exd5!

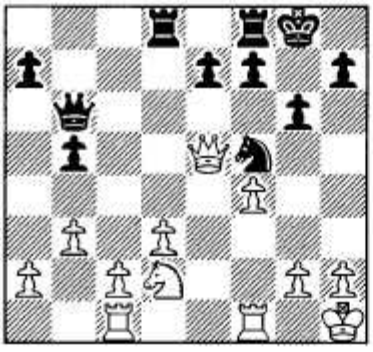
White wins a pawn in broad daylight.

15...cxd5 16 ♕e5+ ♔g8 17 ♕xd5



White is a pawn up for nothing and should win but, unfortunately, my technique does not prove equal to the task.

17...♕c7 18 ♖ac1 b5 19 ♕e5 ♕b6+ 20 ♔h1 ♘f5



21 ♘f3?

A blunder. The positional problem is how does White secure and advance the queenside pawn majority? The answer is the simple and calm 21 a3! If Black tries to force an advance on the queenside with 21...a5, then White makes a favourable exchange with a little stutter-step: 22 a4! bxa4 23 bxa4 and then a transfer of the knight to c4, White consolidating and remaining with a passed c-pawn. 21...♘e3 offers no counterplay in this variation because after 22 ♖f3 ♘g4 23 ♕e1 Black has no more threats, while his knight will be driven back and White's majority is ready to advance. This means there's nothing left for Black but 21...♖c8, but then 22 c3!! (the queenside pawns march together) 22...♖c5 (22...♖fd8 23 d4 ♕a5 and now simplest is 24 ♘b1 and everything holds, although White can also win with the more entertaining 24 ♘e4 ♕xa3 25 ♘c5 ♕b2 26 b4 e6 27 ♕e1, threatening to trap the queen, and Black won't emerge without material loss) 23 ♕e1 ♖fc8 24 ♘e4 ♖5c6 25 b4 and White blocks the c-file with ♘c5, when Black can either resign, helplessly await the pawn avalanche, or sacrifice the exchange on c5 just to prolong the agony – but in no case does Black have any serious chance of saving the game.

21...♖d6?

My opponent blunders right back. 21...♘e3! wins the exchange as 22 ♖f2 loses to 22...♘g4, and any other rook move allows ...♘g4-f2, so White must play 22 ♕e7 and hope for a draw.

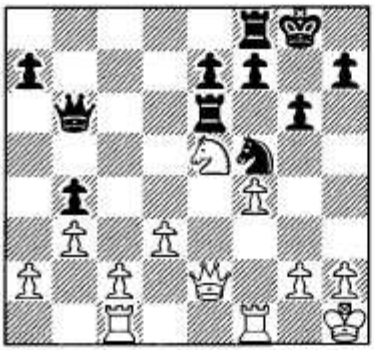
22 ♕e2?!

And now 22 c4! should again win for White. Yes, I realize this is getting ridiculous, so I will only lightly annotate the rest of the game, which continues erratically until a draw is reached!

22...b4 23 ♘e5

Even now 23 c4 is best, with Black's compensation insufficient after 23...bxc3 24 ♖xc3.

23...♖e6

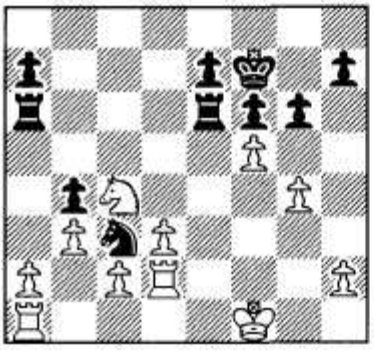


Finally Black has counterplay. Although White still has winning chances, I don't make the most of them.

24 ♕f2 ♖c8 25 ♘c4 ♕xf2 26 ♖xf2 ♘d4 27 g3

The immediate 27 g4 saves an important tempo. Then 27...♖a6 28 c3 still leaves White with good winning chances.

27...♖cc6 28 ♔g2 ♖a6 29 ♖a1 ♘b5 30 ♔f1 f6 31 ♖d2 ♔f7 32 g4 ♘c3 33 f5



33...gxf5 34 gxf5 ♖ec6 35 d4 ♖c8 36 a4 ♖ac6 37 ♖e1 ♖d8 38 ♖d3 ♖c7 39 ♖h3 ♖xd4 40 ♖xh7+ ♔f8 41 ♔g2 ♘xa4 42 ♖e6 ♖cd7 43 ♖e3 ♘b6 44 ♖h8+ ♔f7 45 ♖g3

The last good winning attempt, which would have forced Black to play exceptionally accurately, is 45 ♖eh3! ♖g4+ 46 ♔f3 ♖g7 47 ♘xb6 axb6 48 ♖b8 ♖c7 49 ♖hh8 ♖g5 50 ♖h7+ ♖g7 51 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 52 ♖xb6 ♖xc2 53 ♖xb4 ♖xh2 54 ♖b8 and Black will find it very difficult to draw in view of White's passed pawn, easy king support, and the closed out black king.

45...♘xc4

Now White has nothing better than to force the draw.

46 ♖h7+ ♔f8 47 ♖h8+ ½-½

While the middle and endgame is something of a comedy of errors, the opening is quite instructive in this case as it shows how a few slight inaccuracies against the Bird can lead to a lost position. That said, if Black continues in correct, Petrosian style (6...e6) then White has nothing (or less than nothing!).

Game 22

H.Danielsen-T.Luther

Petermaennchen GM 1999

Let's do something different with this game. Instead of going straight to analysis, I suggest you play through this game first, without notes, in order to appreciate its strange beauty. Consider my favourite move, Danielsen's 14th – at this point White has developed only his queen (having just made eight consecutive pawn moves), so he finally decides to move a piece this time. What does he move? The queen again! And this second queen move is in defiance of every 'rule' about getting your minor pieces out, not playing only with your queen, not mov-

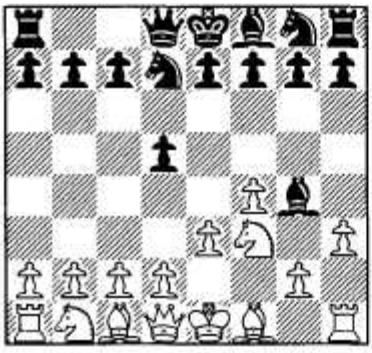
ing too many pawns in the opening and so on. Yet the queen with nothing else developed, gives White a winning position! I know of no better testament to the unknowable joy of chess. Here goes: 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♗g4 3 e3 ♘d7 4 h3 ♗xf3 5 ♕xf3 ♘gf6 6 g4 e6 7 d3 ♗b4+ 8 c3 ♗d6 9 e4 dxe4 10 dxe4 e5 11 g5 ♘g8 12 f5 h6 13 h4 ♗e7 14 ♕h5 ♘b6 15 ♗e3 ♕d6 16 ♘a3 c6 17 ♘c4 ♘xc4 18 ♗xc4 0-0-0 19 ♖h2 ♕c7 20 ♗xf7 hxg5 21 ♕xh8 ♘h6 22 ♕xg7 ♘g4 23 f6 1-0.

Okay. Art appreciation is over, let's see if we can decode this game.

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♗g4

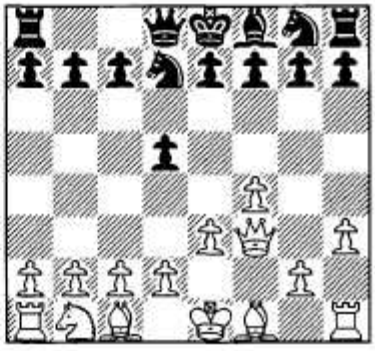
If Black plays the other 'recipe order' with 2...♘f6 3 e3 ♗g4 4 h3 ♗xf3 5 ♕xf3 ♘bd7 we have a transposition to the main game, but note that in this line Black does not have the option of playing the Oratovsky gambit seen in Game 7.

3 e3 ♘d7 4 h3



The critical test of the recipe. White forces the exchange of bishop for knight and brings his queen into play, while also preparing a general advance of the kingside pawns. This idea goes all the way back to Nimzowitsch, but Danielsen has sharpened the play even more. From his two crushing wins (the main game and the one against Salmensuu, given in the notes) we know that the line is very dangerous for Black, although these wild pawn advances could also backfire on White. In general I would recommend to Black that if White comes out ferociously with this line, then hit back immediately or you will be overwhelmed!

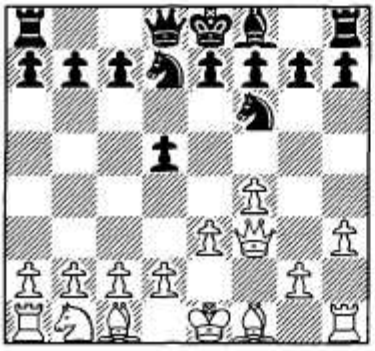
4...♗xf3 5 ♕xf3



5...♘gf6

The position is so sharp that each move is critical. It is possible that Black's latest, ever so natural developing move, is already a mistake (although with so few games played with this line, it's impossible to make a definite conclusion). I think Black should risk the unclear pawn sacrifice of Kramnik-Oratovsky (5...e5 in Game 7) on the principle that it's better to be a pawn down with play than have even material and struggle. Note that White does not have to take the proffered pawn. As I mentioned in the notes to Game 7, when I was confronted with this surprising gambit I took the easy way out and simply developed, with this continuation: 5...e5 6 ♘c3 c6 7 b3 ♗d6

8 ♗b2 ♕c7 9 0-0-0 0-0-0 10 fxe5 ♘xe5 11 ♕f2 ♘f6 12 e4 (12 g4 h6 13 ♗g2 ♘g6 14 ♖hf1 ♗e5 15 ♔b1 ♔b8 16 ♗h1 ♖he8 and Black's central play is enough for a slight edge) 12...♘xe4 13 ♘xe4 dxe4 14 ♕xa7 ♖he8 15 ♗e2 f5, when White's queenside attacking chances were balanced by Black's strong centre in T.Taylor-J.Banawa, Los Angeles (rapidplay) 2005.



6 g4

The bayonet! The idea stems from Nimzowitsch (see Nimzowitsch-Kmoch, below) but Danielsen hyper-accelerates the attack, forfeiting development while his pawns overwhelm the opposition! Here are a few key games where White plays 6 ♘c3 and only then g4.

a) J.Vigus-N.Pert, Witley 1999 went 6...c6 7 g4 e5! (this is the way I like to see Black fight back) 8 g5 ♘g8 9 d3 ♗b4 (but not this) 10 ♗d2 ♘e7 11 a3 ♗d6 12 h4 ♕c7 13 ♗h3 exf4 14 exf4 0-0-0 15 0-0-0 ♔b8 16 h5 and White was clearly better, with more space and the two bishops. Strangely enough, developing moves in this system can often be mistakes. Here 9...♗b4 did nothing to stop White's kingside pawn assault, so the counter-attacking 9...h6 looks preferable, as Black needs to fight back immediately. Play might continue 10 h4 hxg5 11 hxg5 ♖xh1 12 ♕xh1 exf4 13 exf4 ♕b6 14 ♕h5 (14 ♕h8? 0-0-0 15 ♕xg8 ♖e8+ 16 ♗e2 [16 ♔d2 ♕e3+ 17 ♔d1 ♕e1 mate, or 16 ♔d1 ♕g1] 16...♕g1+ 17 ♔d2 d4 with a decisive attack for Black) 14...♘e7 15 a4 ♕b4 16 a5 ♘c5 17 ♗d2 ♘e6 (17...♕xb2? 18 ♕d1 and Black's queen is in trouble) 18 ♗h3 with an extremely strange but approximately equal position. Please don't take any of these lines as gospel – this is all tentative exploration of unknown territory. All I can say for definite is that Black must fight back quickly (for example with 9...h6) or the pawns and bishops will overwhelm him. If Black succeeds in breaking up the pawns, weaknesses are left behind, which the knights could exploit.

b) 6...e6 7 g4 ♗b4 8 g5 and now

b1) The game A.Nimzowitsch-H.Kmoch, Kecskemet 1927 saw 8...♗xc3 9 bxc3 ♘e4 10 d3 ♘d6 11 c4 c6 12 e4 dxe4 13 dxe4 f5 14 exf5 (the eighth straight pawn move is evidently a theme of this opening, but each has a purpose, and that is to pry open the position for White's bishops, which are now unleashed) 14...♕a5+ 15 ♗d2 ♕xf5 16 0-0-0 0-0-0 17 ♗c3 ♘e8 18 h4 ♖f8 19 ♗h3 ♕xf4+ 20 ♕xf4 ♖xf4 21 ♗xe6 ♘c7 22 ♗h3 ♖xc4 23 ♗xg7 ♘d5 24 h5 ♔c7 25 g6 hxg6 26 ♗xd7 gxh5 27 ♗e6 h4 28 ♗e5+ ♔b6 29 ♗d4+ ♔b5 30 ♖xh4 c5 31 ♗f2 ♖xc2+ 32 ♔xc2 ♘e3+ 33 ♗xe3 1-0. Beautiful, and way ahead of his time!

b2) The game H.Danielsen-O.Salmensuu, Koge 1997, seventy years after

Nimzowitsch, saw Black try to keep his bishop: 8...♘g8 9 d3 c6 10 ♗d2 h6 11 h4 h5 12 a3 ♗d6 13 ♘e2 ♘e7 14 ♗c3 ♖h7 (ugggh!) 15 ♗h3 ♘f5 (Black addresses the scary bishops, only to get smashed in the centre) 16 ♗xf5 exf5 17 e4! fxe4 18 dxe4 ♘b6 19 exd5 cxd5 20 ♕d3 g6 21 f5! and White had a decisive advantage. Black thrashed around for a few more moves, but Danielsen's grip never eased – 21...♔d7 22 a4 ♕e8 23 a5 ♘c4 24 ♕xd5 ♖c8 25 ♕xb7+ ♖c7 26 ♕b5+ ♖c6 27 ♖h3 ♘e3 28 ♖a4 gxf5 29 ♕d3! 1-0. This has to be, next to the main game, one of the most savage Bird crushes on record.

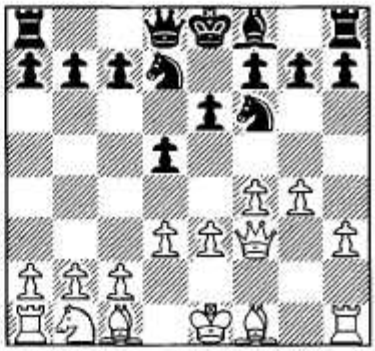
c) Clearly Black does not want to lose in such horrific fashion – therefore I suggest gambit play again, namely (after 6 ♘c3) 6...e5. This might be best, similar to Kramnik-Oratovsky, but with knights exchanged. 7 ♘xd5 (7 g4 might transpose back to Vigus-Pert, given above, where Black had his chances with the possible 9...h6) 7...♘xd5 8 ♕xd5 ♕h4+ 9 ♔d1 c6 10 ♕e4 ♗d6 and Black has good compensation. This generally goes with my theme that Black must fight back quickly before he is buried by the pawns.

Now back to the main game.

6...e6

You can't get more natural than this. Black defends his centre pawn and opens up the king's bishop. This is how we are taught to play, and the strong Grandmaster in charge of Black's forces is playing 'correctly' – but Danielsen's ostensibly irrational pawn storm sweeps away Black's correctness. Once again I offer a gambit – I believe that 6...e5 is best (again, my idea is an immediate, sharp counter in the centre) with the sacrifice, this time, of the b-pawn. Play could continue 7 g5 e4 (7...♘e4 8 d3 ♘d6 9 ♕xd5 exf4 10 exf4 ♕e7+ 11 ♔f2 0-0-0 12 ♕a5 favours White as his attacking threats make it impossible for Black to find full play for the pawn) 8 ♕e2 ♘g8 9 ♕b5 (9 h4 h6 10 ♗h3 ♘e7 is double- edged but even) 9...c6 10 ♕xb7 ♘e7 and Black has development compensation for the missing pawn.

7 d3!



White might already be better, with only his queen developed! It's hard to find a clear equalizer (if there is one) as White simply plans e3-e4 with a big space advantage. This in turn accentuates the influence of White's bishops, which are in their element when supporting far-flung pawn advances.

7...♗b4+

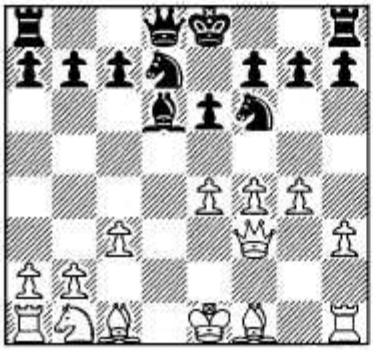
If the bishop is going to move I think it should go to d6 immediately because White is happy to advance the c-pawn (but the bishop check is the kind of over-refinement GMs like). Also less than stellar is 7...♘c5, trying to prevent e3-e4 without success: White will simply

play 8 g5 and then e3-e4 on the next move! However, a serious alternative to piece development is the modest 7...h6, trying to slow White's kingside pawn advance. I'm sure White would play 8 e4, and now there are two branches:

a) 8...dxe4 9 dxe4 ♗c5 10 ♘c3 e5 11 f5 ♕e7 12 ♗d2 0-0-0 13 0-0-0 with an edge for White due to the kingside space, which could lead later to a pawn storm gaining still more territory.

b) 8...♗c5 9 e5 ♘g8 10 c3 ♕h4+ 11 ♔d1 ♗b6 (11...d4 12 ♗g2) 12 d4 when White's plus in space is to some extent balanced by Black's lead in development, although one cannot say the second player has fully equalized, e.g. 12...c5 13 dxc5 ♗xc5 (13...♘xc5 14 ♗b5+ ♔f8 15 ♗e3 and White will complete development with an edge) 14 ♗b5 0-0-0 15 ♔c2 ♘e7 16 ♘d2 ♕f2 17 ♕xf2 ♗xf2 18 ♖f1 ♗b6 19 ♘b3 h5 20 g5 ♘f5 21 a4 ♘e3+ 22 ♗xe3 ♗xe3 23 ♖ae1 ♗b6 24 a5 ♗c7 25 a6 with a continual territorial squeeze – even in the ending.

8 c3 ♗d6 9 e4 dxe4 10 dxe4



10...e5

This invites the pawns to roll forward – but in the case of 10...♘g8!? 11 g5 (11 ♗e3 is also good) 11...c6 12 ♘d2, intending ♘c4, White drives Black back with advantage.

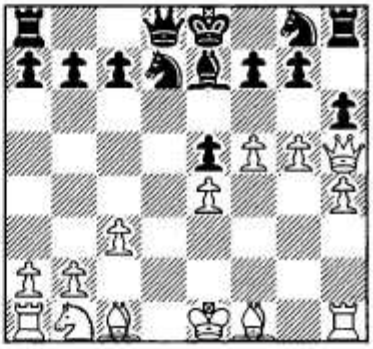
11 g5 ♘g8 12 f5 h6

Running to the queenside is Black's only hope, so preferable is 12...♕e7 13 ♕h5 0-0-0 14 ♗c4 f6 15 h4 and White is clearly better but Black still survives.

13 h4 ♗e7

Also now 13...♕e7 is correct. I imagine Black missed White's next. With nothing developed but the white queen, one hardly expects that piece to move again – yet it does, and with devastating effect.

14 ♕h5!!



Immobilizing Black's entire position with a key pin of the h6-pawn (f7 is monitored, too). White is practically winning, in defiance of every beginners book that says develop your minor pieces and not your queen!

14...♘b6

Directed against the deadly ♗c4.

15 ♗e3

The cramping 15 g6 f6 16 ♗e3 is also very strong.

15...♕d6 16 ♘a3 c6

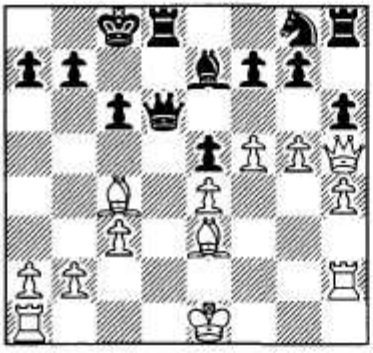
Black's problem is that he can't flee

with ...0-0-0 because the f-pawn hangs, while 16...g6 17 ♕f3 hxg5 18 hxg5 ♖xh1 19 ♕xh1 gxf5 (19...0-0-0 loses to 20 ♘b5 as 20...♕c6 loses the queen to the fork on a7, while 20...♕d7 allows 21 fxg6!, threatening a fatal pin) 20 ♖d1 ♕e6 21 exf5 opens up for White's attack.

17 ♘c4 ♘xc4 18 ♗xc4 0-0-0

Black runs with his king. 18...g6 19 ♕f3 is just as bad as the 16...g6 variation, above.

19 ♖h2!



Another unorthodox but extremely strong move. White prepares ♖d2, nipping in the bud any counterplay. Black's kingside is destroyed in any case, so there is no need to capture material immediately.

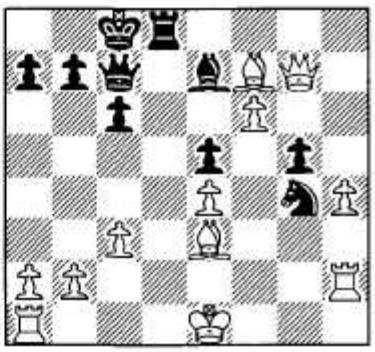
19...♕c7

Alternatives are no better: 19...g6 20 ♕g4 with too many threats, or 19...f6 20 ♗e6+ ♔b8 21 ♖d2 ♕c7 22 0-0-0 and Black is wrapped up tight.

20 ♗xf7 hxg5

Desperation, which is elegantly refuted by Danielsen.

21 ♕xh8 ♘h6 22 ♕xg7 ♘g4 23 f6! 1-0



White wins in all variations, as can quickly be seen:

a) 23...♘xf6 24 ♗e6+ ♔b8 25 ♗xg5.

b) 23...♘xe3 24 ♗e6+ ♔b8 25 ♕xe7.

c) 23...♘xh2 24 ♗e6+ ♔b8 25 ♕xe7 ♘f3+ 26 ♔e2.

d) 23...♗xf6 24 ♗e6+ ♔b8 25 ♗xa7+ ♔xa7 26 ♕xc7 ♘xh2 27 ♖d1.

A spectacular win for Danielsen.

Summary

The Bird player needs to know this line well because it is very popular due to its status as the all-purpose anti-Bird recipe. White can play solidly, with calm development and central play (Game 19), and this should be good for a modest edge. But White must be careful to avoid Game 20, where Black generates a rapid attack. Game 21 features the now discredited old main line where, if Black plays accurately, he should achieve at least equality. Game 22 is a fierce attempt to refute the recipe altogether, and this is the critical battleground today. My recommendation for Black is to fight back against White with gambit play rather than allow the pawns to roll forward unopposed.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Leningrad Bird

One of the most popular Dutch variations is the Leningrad, with the fianchetto of the king's bishop. Similarly, one of the most popular Bird variations is a reversed Leningrad, where White plays an early g2-g3. Our friend GM Danielsen plays the Leningrad Bird almost exclusively. I also preferred this variation when I started playing the Bird in serious competition, and scored my first Bird win against a GM with it.

The first three games of this chapter focus on typical Dutch reversed lines where Black must be very careful. Lines that are playable versus the Dutch can be disastrous against the Bird's simply because of that extra tempo. Games 23 and 25 show such tempo problems, while Game 24 features a sound classical setup for Black.

In the last three games we investigate independent lines. Of these, I think Game 26 is most interesting, as it has given Bird expert Danielsen the most trouble. In this line Black openly plays for a slightly worse but very drawish position. This is not exactly what the bold attacking player who dares 1 f4 wants, and Danielsen crashed and burned twice trying to make something out of almost nothing. If an improvement cannot be found in this line, then I suggest you put your Petrosian hat on and take it slow and easy, confident that there's no way you can lose if you play solidly (although Danielsen proved you can certainly lose if you overreach). Finally, Games 27 and 28 feature direct and almost primitive attempts by Black to fight against the Leningrad, but both rebound to White's favour.

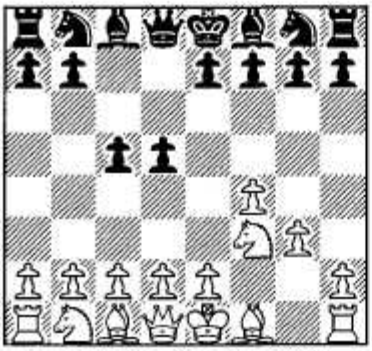
Game 23
H.Danielsen-K.Edvardsson
Reykjavik (rapidplay) 2003

1 f4 d5

This game is a warning of *how not to play* against the Bird. Black plays a known and very sharp anti-Leningrad Dutch line, but he doesn't pay attention to the missing tempo and is in serious

trouble by the 9th move!

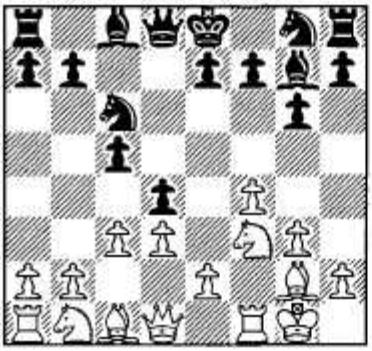
2 ♘f3 c5 3 g3



3...♘c6 4 ♗g2 g6 5 0-0 ♗g7 6 d3 d4

I would wait before this committal move, but it's as though Everson thought he was White!

7 c3



7...♘h6

This rim development of the knight is part of the system – for White. Here's what a typical Dutch game looks like with this line: 1 d4 f5 2 c4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 g6 4 g3 ♗g7 5 ♗g2 0-0 6 ♘h3 d6 7 d5 c6 8 ♘f4 (Y.Seirawan-J.Tisdall, Reykjavik 1990). Notice how White is locked in on e6 with a pawn and knight. Black has an uphill struggle to free himself.

Now look at the Bird position before you – where is the missing tempo? Obviously, it's the fact the black knight has not made it to f5 yet. Consequently White is able to push with e2-e4 immediately, which renders Black's strategy rather pointless.

8 e4

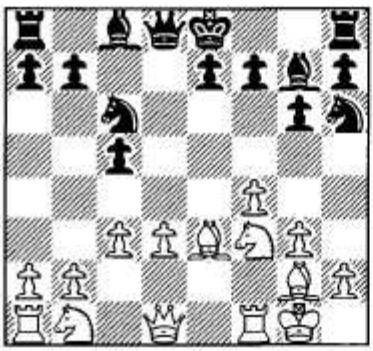
This is good, sound, aggressive chess, albeit not the only possibility. White can also use the tempo to quietly build up, as in K.Movsziszian-C.Ionescu, Berga 1996, which continued 8 ♕e1 ♘f5 9 ♘a3 ♖b8 10 ♘c4 h5 11 h3 b5 12 ♘ce5 ♗b7 13 g4 (White plays around the edges and works his way in to the centre) 13...hxg4 14 hxg4 ♘xe5 15 fxe5 ♘e3 16 ♗xe3 dxe3 17 ♕g3 ♕c7 18 d4 cxd4 19 cxd4 ♖d8 20 ♕f4 ♗xf3 (20...f6) 21 ♖xf3 c6 22 ♖xe3 ♕b6 23 ♖d1 ♗h6 24 g5 ♗xg5 25 ♕xg5 ♖xd4 26 ♖xd4 ♕xd4 27 ♗f3 ♕d1+ 28 ♔f2 ♖h2+ 29 ♗g2 ♖h5 30 ♕g4 ♕d2 31 ♕e4 ♖f5+ 32 ♗f3 ♔f8 33 ♕h4 ♕a5 34 ♖d3 g5 35 ♕h8+ ♔e7 36 ♕c8 ♕b6+ 37 ♔g2 ♖xe5 38 ♖d7+ 1-0. This is a nice win, but unless improvements for Black can be found (I couldn't find any) I would just go ahead with Danielsen's 8 e4 and direct attack.

8...dxe3

Black doesn't have to take en passant, but if he plays the seemingly solid 8...e5, then he has to realize that he is playing a reversed King's Indian Defence two (not one) tempi down – one tempo for reversed colours and another because in the King's Indian Black must move the knight before advancing the f-pawn. In the Bird, that happens in reverse order,

saving a tempo. Down two moves it is impossible to believe that Black can equalize, and analysis bears this out: 9 cxd4 cxd4 10 h3 (now White threatens 11 fxe5, when Black cannot recapture due to the poorly placed knight, while Black cannot counter with ...♘g4, either) 10...f6 11 fxe5 ♘xe5 12 ♘xe5 fxe5 and now in S.Berger-G.Von Buelow, Hamburg 2000, White unaccountably played 13 b3?, which gave Black a free pass. Instead White gets a big advantage with 13 ♕b3, catching Black in the centre. Then 13...♕e7 14 ♗xh6 ♗xh6 15 ♕b5+ ♗d7 16 ♕xb7 sees White win a pawn while Black is still unable to castle.

9 ♗xe3



White has an important lead in development (both sides have three pieces out but White is castled and the knight on h6 hardly helps Black), but even more significant is the direct attack on c5. I have not been able to find any satisfactory way for Black to defend the pawn.

9...♕d6

Others:

a) 9...♗f5 10 ♗xc5 ♕xd3 11 ♕xd3 ♗xd3 12 ♖e1 (as usual, the open lines favour the better developed player) 12...♖d8 13 ♘bd2 ♖d7 14 ♘b3 b6 15 ♘bd4 ♘xd4 16 ♗xd4 f6 17 ♖ad1 ♗a6 18 ♘g5 0-0 19 ♘e6 and Black resigned in G.Llanos-D.Adla, Buenos Aires 1991 in view of 19...♖f7 20 ♗c6(-e8), or 19...♖c8 20 ♘xg7 and ♗xf6+.

b) 9...b6 10 ♘e5 ♘xe5 11 ♗xa8 ♘xd3 12 ♗e4 ♗f5 (12...♘xb2 13 ♕c2) 13 ♕a4+ and Black has insufficient compensation for the exchange.

c) 9...♕b6 is an extremely odd move, putting the queen in the firing line of the white bishop. But it may well be Black's best chance. Nonetheless, White secures an edge with exact play: 10 ♕b3! (10 b4? ♘xb4 and Black is better, or 10 ♕e2 ♘g4 11 ♗f2 ♘xf2 12 ♖xf2 [White has nothing] 12...♕c7 13 ♘a3 0-0 14 ♘c4 e6 15 a4 b6 16 ♘g5 ♖b8 17 ♘e4 ♗d7 18 ♗h3 a6 19 ♕e3 f5 20 ♘g5 ♖fe8 ½-½, T.Haub-A.Lein, Kiel 2002) 10...♗f5 (10...♕xb3 11 axb3 and the c-pawn drops) 11 ♕a3! ♗xd3 12 ♗xc5 ♕b5 (12...♕a6 13 ♖e1 ♕xa3 14 ♘xa3 0-0-0 15 ♘e5 and White's position is so dominant that I doubt Black can get through the next few moves without material loss) 13 ♖e1 0-0 14 ♘bd2 and Black is under great pressure.

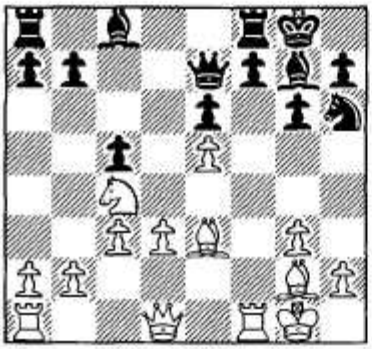
10 ♘a3

Black is really hurting in view of the weakness of his c-pawn.

10...e6

Holding the pawn but (much worse) weakening the kingside dark squares, and it can't be good to use all the powers of the queen merely to defend a pawn. Better, but still not fun, is 10...♗f5 11 ♘b5 ♕d7 12 ♗xc5 ♗xd3 13 ♘c7+ ♕xc7 14 ♕xd3 and White's bishops provide a significant edge.

11 ♘c4 ♕e7 12 ♘fe5 ♘xe5 13 fxe5 0-0

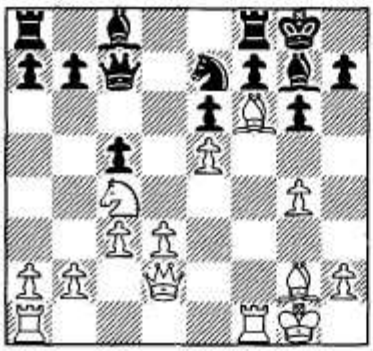


Fritz already judges that White has a decisive advantage – look at those terrible holes at f6 and h6!

14 ♕d2 ♘f5 15 ♗g5 ♕c7 16 g4

Danielsen's favourite bayonet attack.

16...♘e7 17 ♗f6



Try to avoid this with Black!

17...♘d5 18 ♖ae1 ♗d7 19 g5 ♗c6 20 ♗e4 ♘e7 21 ♘d6 ♖ad8 22 ♕f4 ♘f5 23 ♗xf5 gxf5 24 ♖e3 ♗xf6 25 gxf6 ♔h8 26 ♔f2 ♖g8 27 ♖g1 ♖g6

27...♖xg1 28 ♔xg1 ♖g8+ 29 ♖g3 ♖g6 30 ♖xg6 fxg6 31 f7 ♕e7 32 ♕h6 with mate to follow.

28 ♖h3 ♖dg8 29 ♕h4 1-0

Black resigns not a moment too soon (29...h6 30 ♕xh6+ ♖xh6 31 ♖xh6 is mate).

This was an absolute crush, but Black has only himself to blame – these sharp anti-Dutch lines can be played only by White, as the extra tempo is simply too significant.

Game 24

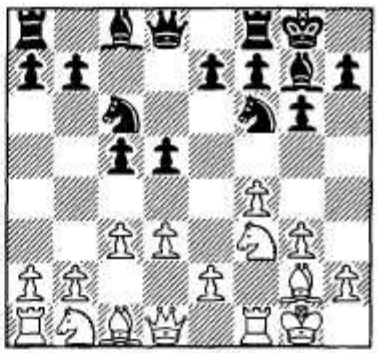
H.Danielsen-A.Petrosian

Petermaennchen GM 1999

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 g3 ♗g7 4 ♗g2 ♘f6 5 0-0 c5 6 d3 0-0 7 c3

The other way to go is 7 ♘c3 (see the next main game).

7...♘c6



Compared to the previous game this is a much better way to play – classical development (no ...♘h6) and no precipitous central pawn advance. Black doesn't try to win in the opening (a strategy which we have seen can backfire badly when playing systems designed to work with an extra tempo) and is happy with equality. For the other good alternative, 7...b6, see Game 26.

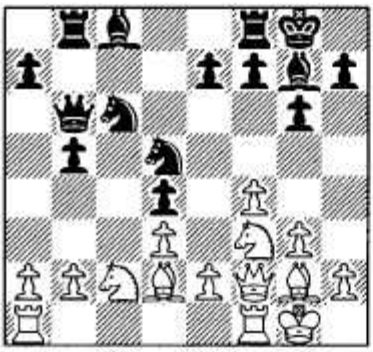
8 ♕e1 d4

Now this is correct because Black doesn't want White to get in e2-e4 for free. Note that I am recommending conservative play for Black but *not* passive play! The dangers of the latter can be seen in R.Mascarinas-S.Hmadi, Manila 1990, which went 8...b6 9 e4 dxe4 10 dxe4 e6 (10...♗a6 improves – hence White's next) 11 ♕e2 ♕c7 12 ♘bd2 ♗b7 13 e5 ♘d5 14 ♘e4 with a big advantage for White.

9 ♘a3

Unlike the previous game, 9 e4 does nothing as the d-pawn hangs: 9...dxe3 10 ♗xe3 ♕xd3 11 ♗xc5 ♖e8 12 ♘bd2 ♕b5 13 ♘b3 ♗f5 with a level game.

9...♖b8 10 ♗d2 ♘d5 11 ♘c2 b5 12 cxd4 cxd4 13 ♕f2 ♕b6



The situation is balanced. Black has more space in the centre and on the queenside, but White has play against the d-pawn and has the initiative – if not a real attack – on the kingside.

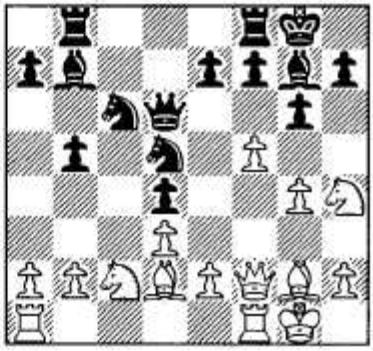
14 ♘h4

Danielsen is trying to make something happen in an even position. His risk pays off eventually, but only after some scary moments! 14 ♘e5 ♘xe5 15 fxe5 ♗b7 16 ♕xd4 ♗xe5 17 ♕xb6 ♘xb6 is the kind of dead even position he is trying to avoid but, unfortunately, the position *is* dead even, so pushing hard is a dangerous approach.

14...♕d8 15 f5

Of course Danielsen is not interested in the draw by repetition.

15...♗b7 16 g4 ♕d6



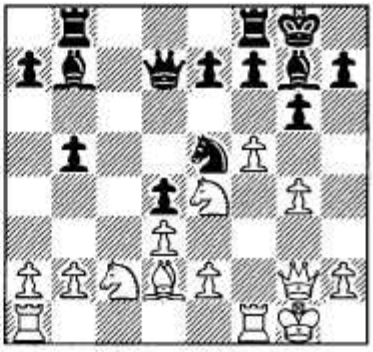
17 ♘f3?

Now White has to give up one of his bishops. Instead 17 g5 would maintain the balance.

17...♘f4

This secures Black a lead, regardless of which bishop White elects to keep.

18 ♘g5 ♘xg2 19 ♘e4 ♕d7 20 ♕xg2 ♘e5



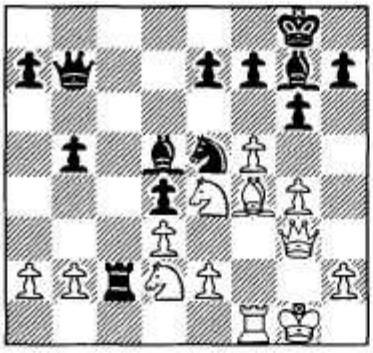
21 ♖ab1

Contesting the c-file doesn't help that much: 21 ♖ac1 ♖bc8 22 fxg6 hxg6 23 g5 ♖c7 24 ♘a1 ♖fc8 and Black is better, with the two bishops and more space.

21...♖bc8 22 ♘a1 ♗d5

White has no real kingside attack, and Black's queenside play grows more menacing with every move. Was Danielsen regretting that spurned repetition now?

23 ♘b3 ♖c2 24 ♖f2 ♖fc8 25 ♗f4 ♕b7 26 ♘bd2 ♖c1+ 27 ♖xc1 ♖xc1+ 28 ♖f1 ♖c2 29 ♕g3



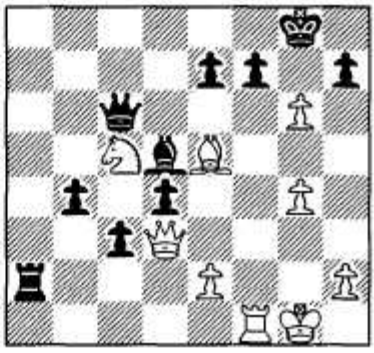
29...♘c4??

Just when victory is in his grasp, Black gets fancy for no reason. Correct is the simple, boring, *winning* 29...♘c6 when, no matter how White plays, Black picks up a pawn for nothing – and should have no technical problems as he retains all his positional advantages.

30 ♘c5

Obviously completely overlooked by Black, this simple attack on the queen wins a piece, but White's position is so poor that Black gets adequate compensation. However, on the other hand, Black is undoubtedly so upset at throwing away his winning position that his play deteriorates.

30...♕c6 31 dxc4 bxc4 32 b4 c3 33 ♕d3 ♖xa2 34 ♘f3 a5 35 ♘e5 ♗xe5 36 ♗xe5 axb4 37 fxg6



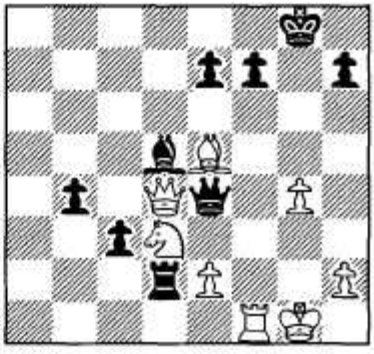
37...♕xg6?

37...hxg6 38 ♗xd4 (38 ♕xd4 ♖xe2 39 ♖f2 ♖xe5 wins for Black as there are too many pawns for the exchange) 38...♖d2 39 ♕e3 f6 40 ♕xe7 ♖xd4 41 ♖xf6 ♖xg4+ 42 ♔f2 ♕a8 with wild play, when Black is still very much in the game.

38 ♕xd4 ♖d2 39 ♘d3?

This must be time pressure, for the obvious 39 ♕b4 (get rid of one of the dangerous pawns and threaten mate) wins with ease.

39...♕e4



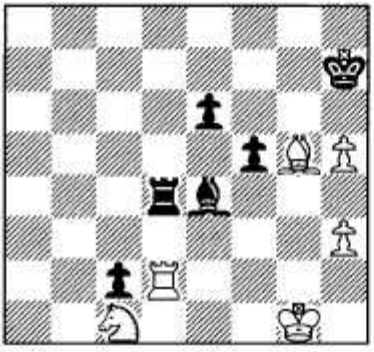
40 ♕xe4 ♗xe4 41 ♘xb4 ♖xe2 42 ♖d1 ♖d2 43 ♖e1 c2

An ending has been reached in which Black's strong passed pawn compensates for White's extra piece. The game should be drawn, but I imagine Black was still kicking himself for his blunder on the 29th move, and it is difficult to play accurately with that kind of mental turmoil.

44 ♗g3 h5 45 gxh5 e6 46 ♘a2 ♗d5 47 ♘c1 ♔h7 48 ♗f4 ♖d4 49 ♖f1 f5 50 h3 ♖e4 51 ♗g5 ♖d4 52 ♖f2 ♗e4?

Black slips! 52...♖d1+ 53 ♔h2 ♗c4 54 ♔g3 e5 maintains a firm grasp on the draw, and might offer winning chances if White gets too frisky.

53 ♖d2!



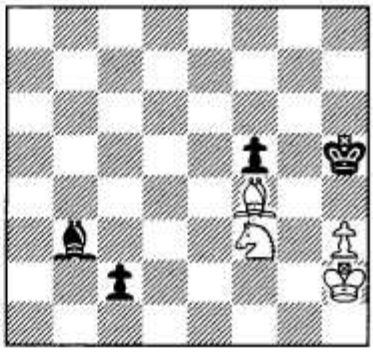
53...♖xd2

Since 53...♖a4 54 ♖d7+ ♔g8 55 h6 wins Black must exchange rooks, thus losing his best piece and, with it, pretty much all his active counterplay. The point is that his last remaining piece can never – unlike the rook – support the c-pawn's promotion square.

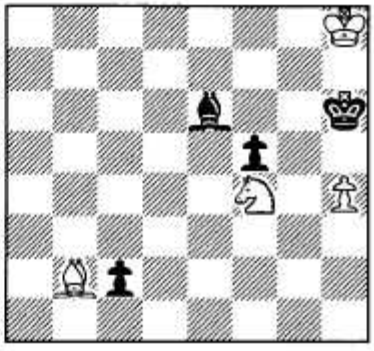
54 ♗xd2

From here to the end Danielsen plays in exemplary style. In fact the final king march is a thing of beauty.

54...e5 55 ♗c3 ♔h6 56 ♗xe5 ♔xh5 57 ♗f4 ♔h4 58 ♔h2 ♗d5 59 ♘d3 ♗c4 60 ♘e1 ♗b3 61 ♘f3+ ♔h5



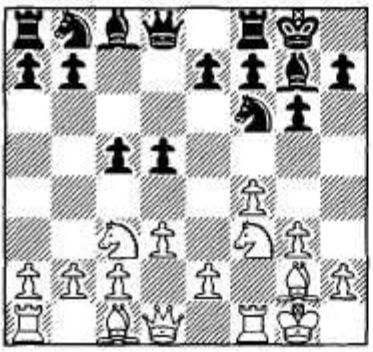
62 ♔g3 ♗d5 63 ♘d4 ♗e4 64 ♗c1 ♗d3 65 ♘e6 ♗c4 66 ♘f4+ ♔g5 67 h4+ ♔h6 68 ♗b2 ♗a6 69 ♔f2 ♗b7 70 ♔e3 ♗c6 71 ♔d4 ♗b7 72 ♔e5 ♗c8 73 ♔f6 ♗d7 74 ♔f7 ♗c8 75 ♔g8 ♗e6+ 76 ♔h8! 1-0



Not even 76...c1♕ will prevent 77 ♗g7 mate! Black played successfully in the opening and reached a completely equal position. White's risky attempt to make something out of nothing could easily have rebounded but, nonetheless, a win for the daring Danielsen!

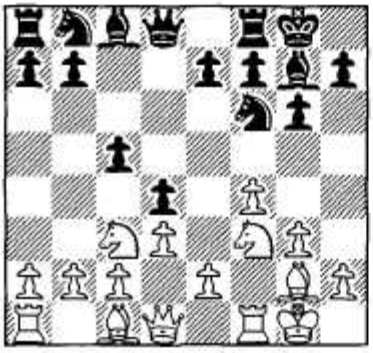
Game 25
P.Ricardi-L.Dominguez
Bled Olympiad 2002

1 g3 d5 2 ♗g2 ♘f6 3 f4 g6 4 ♘f3 ♗g7 5 0-0 0-0 6 d3 c5 7 ♘c3



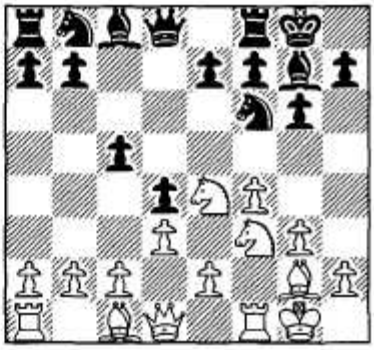
A direct line. White immediately threatens 8 e4, thus obliging Black's response. However, I think this is stronger in the Classical Variation (see Game 8) because there White's e-pawn is already at e3, ready to challenge when Black advances the d-pawn.

7...d4



8 ♘e4

White got absolutely nowhere with 8 ♘a4 in A.Berescu-M.Parligras, Timisu de Sus 1998: 8...♘bd7 9 c4 ♖b8 10 ♖b1 b6 11 b4 ♗b7 12 ♔h1 ♕c7 13 e4 dxe3 and a draw was agreed. Black might be better already here. Consider 14 ♗xe3 cxb4 15 ♖xb4 ♕d6 16 ♕b3 ♗c6 17 ♖d1 ♘g4 18 ♗g1 a5 and Black wins the exchange, or 16 ♖b1 ♘g4 17 ♗g1 ♖fd8 18 d4 e6 and Black has good play against White's hanging pawns.



8...♘xe4

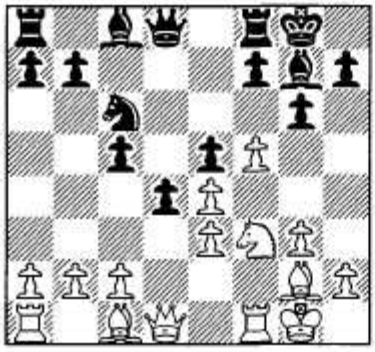
Ostensibly automatic but, in fact, not forced. Black has the very interesting alternative 8..♕b6, as played in R.Przedmojski-G.Milos, Koszalin 1997. I find GM Milos's treatment very instructive – somewhat rarely for a GM, he treats the Bird with respect! He plays steadily without attempting refutation, and White, as in the previous main game, gets nothing, and, soon after, less than nothing. The game continued 9 ♔h1 (9 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 10 e4 dxe3 11 ♘e5 ♘c6 12 ♘c4 ♕c7 13 ♘e3 with equality is preferable) 9...♘c6 10 ♘h4 ♘xe4 11 dxe4 (if 11 ♗xe4 ♗h3 12 ♗g2 ♗xg2+ 13 ♘xg2 e6 and Black has no problems and perhaps stands slightly better) 11...c4 (Black is definitely better now) 12 h3 c3

13 b3 a5 14 a3 a4 15 b4 ♗c6 16 g4 ♗c4 17 ♘f3 ♕b5 18 ♖f2 ♖ad8 19 ♘e1 f5 20 gxf5 gxf5 21 e5 ♔h8 22 ♘f3 ♖g8 23 ♔h2 ♗h6 24 ♗h1 ♖g7 25 ♕e1 ♗d5 26 ♘h4 e6 27 ♗f3 ♖dg8 28 ♕h1 ♘e7 29 e3 ♕b6 30 ♕e1 ♖g1 31 ♕e2 dxe3 32 ♗xe3 ♗xf4+ 33 ♗xf4 ♖xa1 34 ♖g2 ♖xg2+ 35 ♕xg2 ♗xf3 36 ♘xf3 ♘g6 37 ♗g5 ♕b5 38 ♗f6+ ♔g8 39 ♘d4 ♕f1 40 ♘xe6 ♕xg2+ 41 ♔xg2 ♖xa3 42 ♘d4 ♖a1 43 e6 a3 0-1. Not every GM plays badly against the Bird.

9 dxe4 ♘c6 10 e3

10 e5 offers nothing after 10...f6.

10...e5 11 f5



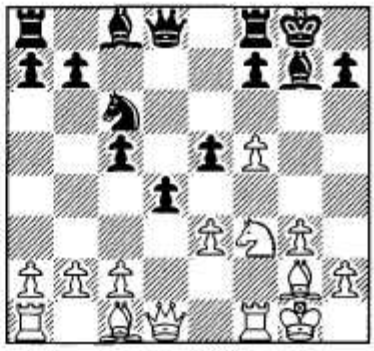
The typical Bird attack. We can see that the rook indirectly defends the f-pawn. Less precipitous is the solid 11 exd4 cxd4 12 ♘e1 (12 fxe5 ♘xe5 13 ♘xe5 [13 ♘xd4?? ♗g4 14 ♕d2 ♘c4 wins a piece] 13...♗xe5 14 ♗f4 ♕c7 15 ♕d3 ♗e6 and Black is a shade better) 12...exf4 13 gxf4 ♕h4 14 ♕f3 ♗g4 15 ♕f2 ♕h5 16 ♘d3 ♗f6 17 ♗f3 (White misses the more active 17 f5 ♗h4 [17...♘e5 18 ♘f4 and the black queen is in trouble] 18 ♕d2 g5 with equality) 17...♗xf3 18 ♕xf3 ♕xf3 19 ♖xf3 ♖ac8, and White had hanging pawns and a weakness at c2 in B.Markov-P.Ivanov, Sofia 1949.

11...gxf5?!

This variation is known from the Dutch, but the tempo situation is obviously different. Moreover, in this sharp position, we're dealing with a big difference, as I pointed out in Game 23. Here is the Dutch variation: 1 d4 f5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♗g2 g6 4 ♘f3 ♗g7 5 0-0 0-0 6 c4 d6 7 ♘c3 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘e5 9 ♘xe5 dxe5 10 e4 f4 11 gxf4 exf4 12 e5 ♘g4 13 e6 (an important point – note how White shuts out the bishop) 13...♘e5 14 ♕b3 f3 15 ♗h3 g5 16 ♖e1 ♕e8 17 ♘e4 g4 18 ♗f1 ♕g6 19 ♕e3 b5 20 cxb5 ♗b7 and now White could have won with 21 ♕c5 in H.Gruenberg-C.Joecks, Germany 2003 (he actually played 21 ♕g5?! and won anyway, but messily).

I think the solid 11...♕b6 (similar to the Milos game) is still best.

12 exf5

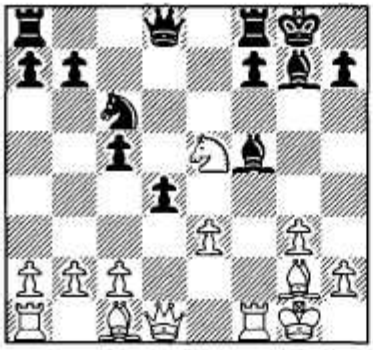


12...♗xf5

In the similar Dutch situation White is able to play e5-e6 and close out the bishop. Here this is obviously not possible as White has used the extra tempo to nudge to e3 himself! Therefore 12...e4

sees Black's pawn stuck as a fixed target, and White takes advantage with 13 ♘h4 ♖e8 14 ♖f4 ♕d5 15 exd4 ♕xd4+ (15...♘xd4 16 c3 is a piece, while 15...♗xd4+ 16 ♔h1 ♕d7 17 ♖xe4 and 15...cxd4 16 f6 ♗f8 17 ♕e1 net a pawn for White) 16 ♕xd4 ♘xd4 17 ♖xe4 ♘e2+ 18 ♔f2 ♖xe4 19 ♗xe4 ♘xc1 20 ♖xc1 ♗xb2 21 ♖b1 ♗d4+ 22 ♔e2 and White's pressure on the queenside is enough for an endgame edge.

13 ♘xe5



White emerges with an opening plus due to his superior pawn structure, although this was hardly forced. More circumspect play from Black (8...♕b6 or 11...♕b6) would have achieved equality.

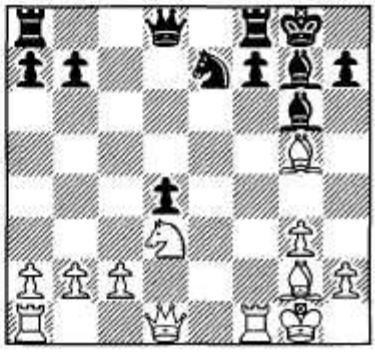
13...♘e7 14 exd4

This is more appropriate than going after material since after 14 e4 ♗e6 15 ♘g4 f5 16 ♘h6+ ♔h8 17 ♘xf5 ♘xf5 18 exf5 ♗xf5 19 ♗xb7 ♖b8 Black has plenty of compensation.

14...cxd4

The ending is similar – 14...♕xd4+ 15 ♕xd4 cxd4 16 ♘d3 ♖ac8 17 ♖f2 and White has about the same size advantage (small but steady) as in the game. White will always come out better in these positions due to Black's three isolated pawns, a legacy of his careless 11...gxf5.

15 ♘d3 ♗g6 16 ♗g5

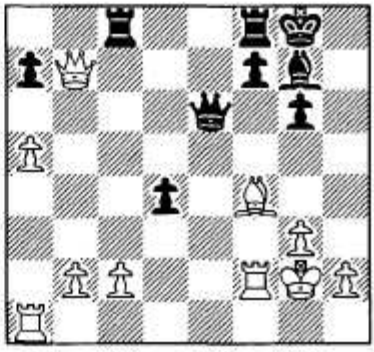


Again White correctly waits before collecting material. In the event of 16 ♗xb7 ♖b8 17 ♗g2 ♘d5 18 ♕f3 ♘e3 19 ♗xe3 dxe3 the two bishops and open lines give Black compensation.

16...♕c7 17 ♗f4 ♕b6 18 a4 ♘f5 19 a5 ♕b5 20 ♕f3 ♕c4 21 ♖f2 ♘e3 22 ♘e5 ♕e6 23 ♘xg6!

All preparations have been made, and it's time to cash in. Although White corrects Black's kingside pawn structure he can now safely take the b-pawn.

23...hxg6 24 ♕xb7 ♘xg2 25 ♔xg2 ♖ac8



26 ♕f3

White has played extremely well so far, but now begins to slip. Also incorrect is the greedy 26 ♕xa7?!, when Black has the surprising shot 26...♖xc2! with sharp counterplay. Best is 26 ♖a3, getting the rook off the long diagonal and monitoring d3. White should then be on his way to victory with the extra pawn.

26...♖c4 27 ♖af1?!

Slipping and sliding! White had to play 27 ♖d1 in order to meet 27...♖fc8 with 28 ♖dd2.

27...♖fc8 28 ♖c1 a6 29 h4 ♖4c5

Black recovers the pawn and even stands a little better.

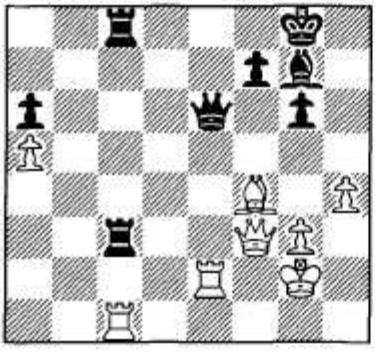
30 c3

30 b4 ♖c3 31 ♕d1 ♕e7 and a white pawn falls.

30...dxc3 31 bxc3 ♖xc3

After the superior 31...♖xa5 Black's outside pawn is the more dangerous. Now the game winds down to a draw.

32 ♖e2



32...♖xf3 33 ♖xe6 ♖xc1 34 ♖e8+ ♔h7 35 ♔xf3 ♖c5 36 ♖e7 ♔g8 37 ♖e8+ ♔h7 38 ♖e7 ♔g8 39 ♖e8+ ½-½

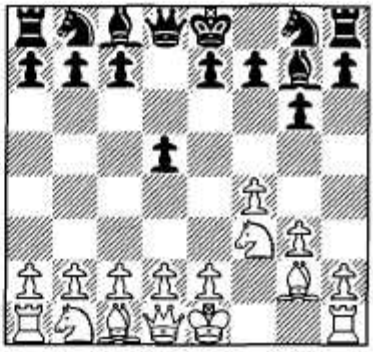
Neither side can avoid the repetition.

Game 26

H.Danielsen-L.Schandorff

Jonsson Memorial, Reykjavik 2001

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 g3 ♗g7 4 ♗g2



4...♘f6

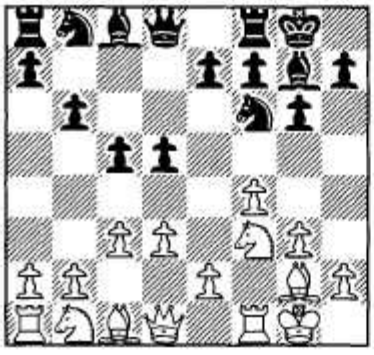
Sending this knight to the edge of the board against the Bird has not done well, and here is one more example (combined with a queenside fianchetto) from a high level game, H.Danielsen-J.Nunn, Reykjavik 1999: 4...♘h6 5 d3 0-0 6 c3 b6 7 0-0 ♗b7 (in the main game, we see this piece find more activity on a6) 8 ♘a3 ♘d7 9 ♕c2 ♖e8 10 e4 dxe4 11 dxe4 ♘c5 12 ♖d1 ♕c8 13 e5 (White is better) 13...♕g4 14 ♕e2 ♘f5 15 ♗e3 ♘e6 16 ♘c2 ♖ad8 17 ♘cd4 ♘cxd4 18 cxd4 ♘xe3 19 ♕xe3 ♗d5 20 ♘g5! (this is excellent strategy – White eliminates all minor pieces except his own active knight and Black's granite-biting bishop) 20...♗xg2 21 ♔xg2 ♖d5 22 ♖ac1 h6 23 h3 ♕c8 24 ♘e4 ♖ed8 25 ♘c3 ♖5d7 26 ♕e4 e6 27 ♖c2 ♔h7 28 a3 ♕a6 29 g4 ♕c4 30 ♘e2 ♕a4 31 f5 exf5 32 gxf5 ♗xe5 33 fxg6+ fxg6 34 ♘c3 ♖xd4 35 ♘xa4 ♖xe4 36 ♖xd8 ♖xa4 37 ♖d7+??

(Danielsen misses a big win by making the unnecessary check, 37 ♖e2 being enough, e.g. 37...♖d4 38 ♖xd4 ♗xd4 39 ♖e7+ ♔g8 40 ♖xc7 and the advantage of the exchange plus the absolute seventh means White will score the full point) 37...♔g8 38 ♖c2 ♖d4 39 ♖xd4 ♗xd4 0-1, apparently on time, as White is still slightly better.

5 0-0 0-0 6 d3

In an earlier game against the same system, Danielsen tried to play on the queenside instead of in the centre, but got nowhere after 6 c3 b6 7 a4 c5 8 ♘e5 ♗a6 9 b4 ♘bd7 10 d3 e6 11 ♘a3 ♕c7 12 d4 ♖fc8, H.Danielsen-H.Stefansson, Torshavn 2000. It is clear that Black has at least equalized, and might stand better thanks to play on the c-file.

6...c5 7 c3 b6!?



This is Black's idea, and very interesting, in my opinion. Unlike virtually every other game we have looked at so far, here Black does not try to prevent White's e2-e4 at all – in fact he virtually forces White to play this favourable advance! What does Black get out of this? Two things: the queens come off, so the normal attacking chances that come with the Bird fly right out that open window and, secondly, Black gets his bishop to a useful open diagonal (a6-f1), where it's influence rivals White's fianchetto. Yes, White is slightly better when all is said and done, but in a practical game can that modest lead be converted to a win? Can an impetuous attacking player like Danielsen calm down enough to play a slightly better ending that should probably end in a draw with best play? This is the kind of line Karpov or Kramnik might play, and draw every time – Black merely wishes to neutralize White's attacking chances and keep the position calm, even if he has to defend for a while.

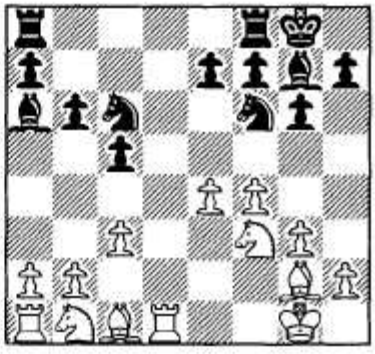
8 e4

In the case of 8 ♕e1 (to avoid the queen trade) Black plays 8...♗a6 and rules out e2-e4, so it is effectively now or never.

8...dxe4 9 dxe4 ♗a6

This is the point behind Black's strategy thus far, gaining a tempo before exchanging queens. Of course 9...♘xe4 can't be considered as the simple 10 ♘fd2 wins by pin.

10 ♖e1 ♕xd1 11 ♖xd1 ♘c6

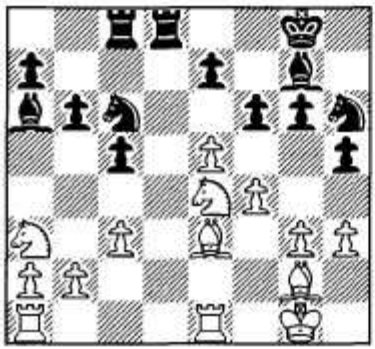


And this is it. The computer gives White an edge, but in real life is that enough?

12 e5 ♘g4 13 ♘g5 ♖fd8!

Because of Black's lead in development he is able to oppose rooks immediately, even with his knight hanging. 13 h3 would have met with the same move.

14 ♖e1 ♖ac8 15 ♘a3 h6 16 ♘e4 h5 17 h3 ♘h6 18 ♗e3 f6!

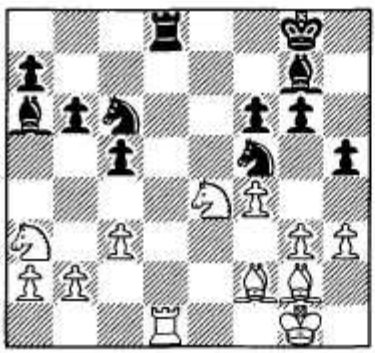


Black wants nothing more than to chop wood and draw.

19 exf6 exf6 20 ♖ad1 ♘f5 21 ♗f2 ♖xd1

Relentless!

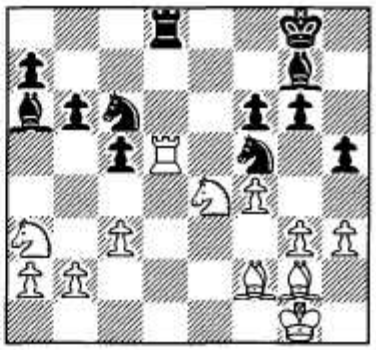
22 ♖xd1 ♖d8



The crucial position has been reached. White should accept reality, that the exchange of rooks is forced, and make the best of it with 23 ♖xd8+ ♘xd8 24 g4, which would still be enough for a lead of sorts. The late Tigran Petrosian would have been happy to play White's side, with more space and greater activity, and if his opponent made 50 correct moves, then a draw is fair. But Danielsen wants to attack, so first he gets fancy and then goes completely off the rails!

23 ♖d5!?

Yes, the trick works (23...♖xd5? 24 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 25 ♗xd5+ and ♗xc6 earns White a pawn), but after Black's simple reply the rook is hanging.



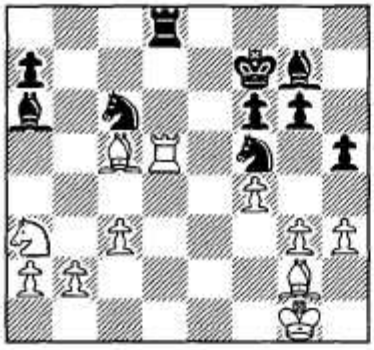
23...♔f8

Now White must play 24 ♖xd8+ and go into the previous line, with the minor difference that the black king is on f8 instead of g8. The verdict of a tiny edge for White would still apply. Sometimes it is necessary to play calmly and keep the draw in hand, but...

24 ♘xc5??

Far from generating winning chances, this sacrifice hurts only White, who must now struggle to draw.

24...bxc5 25 ♗xc5+ ♔f7



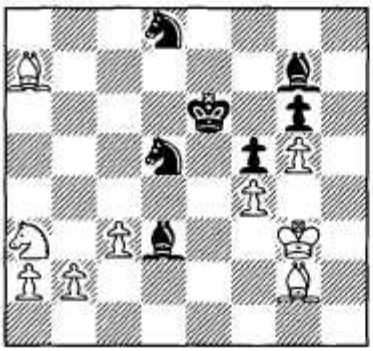
26 g4

Alternatively, White can reach a difficult ending an exchange down – 26 ♖xf5 ♖d1+ 27 ♔h2 gxf5 28 ♗xc6 ♖d2+ 29 ♔g1 ♖xb2 30 ♗xa7 ♗d3 31 ♗d5+ ♔g6 32 ♗b3 ♗e4 33 ♔f1 h4, and Black can play for a win.

26...hxg4 27 hxg4 ♘fe7 28 ♖xd8 ♘xd8 29 ♗xa7 f5 30 g5 ♔e6 31 ♔f2 ♘d5

Although White has three pawns for the piece Black's army is so active that the advantage is all Black's. How can White hold on to his queenside pawns?

32 ♔g3 ♗d3!

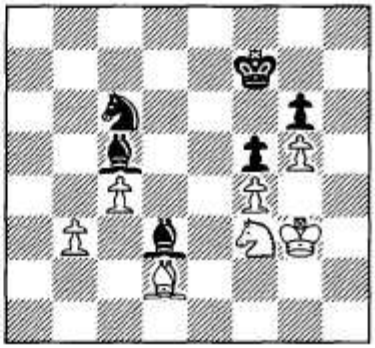


The bishop traps the knight, and Black is no longer playing for a draw!

33 ♗f2 ♗f8 34 c4 ♘b4 35 b3 ♘xa2

The first victim falls.

36 ♘b5 ♔d7 37 ♗e3 ♘e6 38 ♗d5 ♘b4 39 ♗xe6+ ♔xe6 40 ♘d4+ ♔f7 41 ♗d2 ♗c5 42 ♘f3 ♘c6



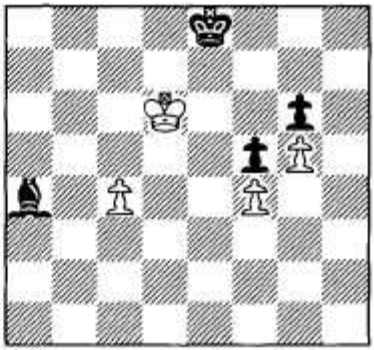
43 b4

Once the first queenside pawn fell, the loss of the second was inevitable. White hurls the b-pawn on to his opponent's sword, realizing nothing will save it.

43...♗xb4 44 ♗xb4 ♘xb4 45 ♘e5+ ♔g7 46 ♔f2 ♗e4 47 ♔e3 ♘c6 48 ♘xc6 ♗xc6

With a bit of good technique the bishop easily copes with its duties on both sides of the board.

49 ♔d4 ♔f7 50 ♔c5 ♗a4 51 ♔d6 ♔e8



52 ♔c7

Or 52 ♔e6 ♗d1 53 ♔d6 ♔d8 54 c5 ♗f3 55 c6 ♗e2 56 c7+ ♔c8 57 ♔c6 ♗h5 58 ♔d6 (58 ♔b6 ♗f3 wins the passed pawn) 58...♗f3 59 ♔e6 ♔xc7 60 ♔f6 ♗h5 and Black holds his pawns, but White can't keep his.

52...♔e7 53 c5 ♔e6 54 ♔d8 ♔d5 55 ♔e7 ♗d1 0-1

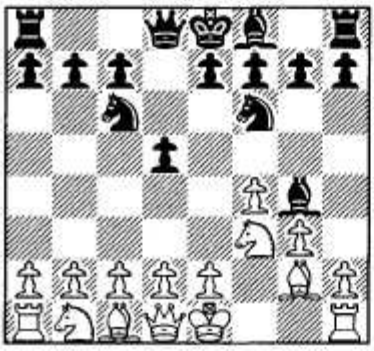
Is 7...b6 the simplest defence to the Leningrad Bird?

Game 27

R.Hübner-S.Pomar

European Cup, Athens 1976

1 g3 d5 2 ♗g2 ♘f6 3 f4 ♘c6 4 ♘f3 ♗g4



Black tries the 'recipe' versus the Leningrad, but there are some differences.

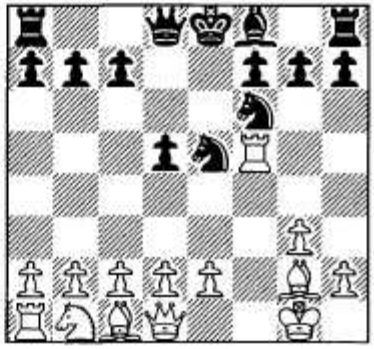
5 0-0 ♗xf3

No doubt expecting 6 ♗xf3 e5 with a good game, but no such luck!

6 ♖xf3!

The unprejudiced capture of a world class player. Huebner sees the coming advance of Black's e-pawn and activates his rook so that it combines with the bishop to attack d5. In Chapter 3 this would not have worked as there the bishop was on e2 – little differences like this can change a position entirely!

6...e5 7 fxe5 ♘xe5 8 ♖f5!



White's point! Hübner pressures the d-pawn from two angles, while also provoking weaknesses on the f-file. Note another key difference to the similar recipe position – in Ferreiro-Damaso, Game 20, this same pawn structure was good for Black, but there the dark-squared bishop was locked in by a pawn on e3. In this game ♗g5 is another important possibility for White, indirectly increasing the pressure on d5.

8...♘eg4

Black is already in trouble, and alternatives do not help. 8...♕e7 9 d4 ♘c4 10 ♕d3 0-0-0 11 ♗g5 carries out White's idea mentioned above, pressuring Black at f6 and d5. Note also that 8...♗d6 9 d4 wins a pawn immediately.

9 d4 ♕d7 10 ♕d3

White threatens to win a piece with 11 h3 and ♗xh6.

10...h5 11 h3 ♘h6 12 ♖e5+

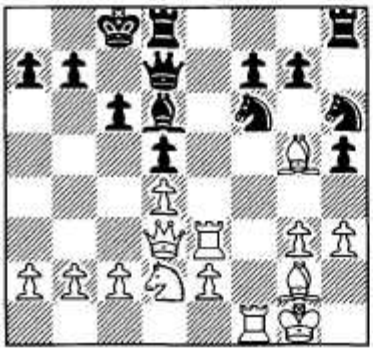
The fearless rook leads White's army!

12...♗e7 13 ♗g5 0-0-0 14 ♘d2 c6

Black wants to hit the daring rook, but

14...♗d6 fails to 15 ♗xf6 gxf6 16 ♖xd5 c6 17 ♖a5, so he first defends the d-pawn.

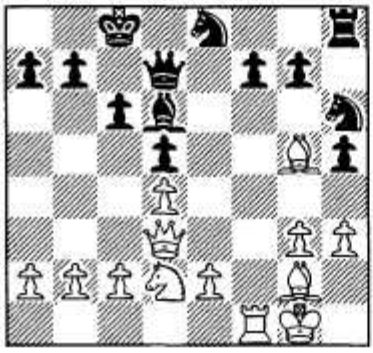
15 ♖f1 ♗d6 16 ♖e3



But the rook casually finds another way to escape! Black is unable to find a way to trap it, and so offers an exchange, but now White is able to utilize his central pawn majority. Still, there doesn't seem to be anything better. If Black waits with 16...♗e7 White has 17 ♘f3, intending ♘e5 and continued attack.

16...♖de8 17 ♖xe8+ ♘xe8

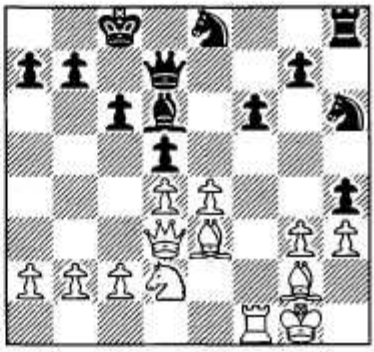
17...♖xe8?? 18 ♗xh6.



18 e4

The central break seals White's advantage – very impressive, albeit perhaps easy for Dr. Hübner.

18...f6 19 ♗e3 h4



Black tries to mix it up, but with White's bishops and central dominance there's not much hope.

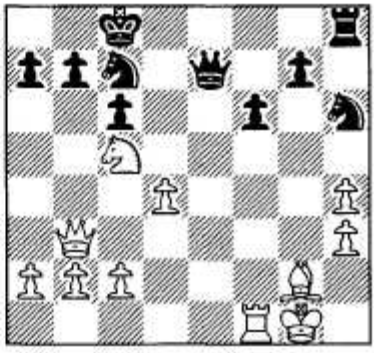
20 gxh4 dxe4 21 ♘xe4 ♗c7 22 ♘c5 ♕d6

Black has a threat for one second...

23 ♗f4

... The second is over!

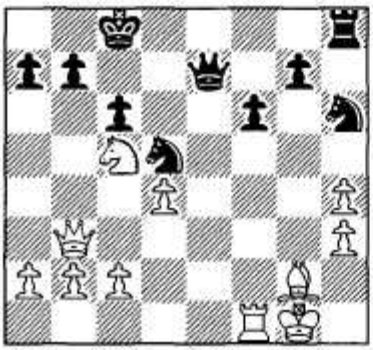
23...♕e7 24 ♗xc7 ♘xc7 25 ♕b3



25...♘d5

This loses another pawn, but White wins prettily after the alternative 25...b6 26 ♗xc6! ♕d6 27 ♗b7+ ♔b8 (27...♔d8 28 ♘e4 ♕xd4+ 29 ♔g2 with a decisive attack) 28 c3 bxc5 (28...♕g3+ 29 ♗g2

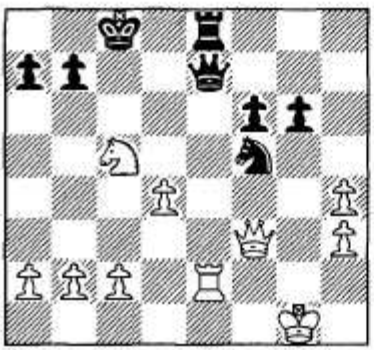
♔c8 30 ♘e4 and again the attack is unstoppable) 29 ♗c6+ ♔c8 30 ♕b7+ ♔d8 31 ♕b8+ ♔e7 32 ♕xh8 ♕xc6 33 ♕xg7+ ♘f7 34 d5 ♕xd5 (34...♘xd5 35 ♖e1+) 35 ♕xf6+ ♔f8 36 h5! and the rook and three pawns are clearly better than Black's two knights.



26 ♗xd5 cxd5 27 ♕xd5 ♖e8

Or 27...♕e3+ 28 ♔g2 ♕e2+ 29 ♖f2 and there are no more checks.

28 ♕f3 g6 29 ♖f2 ♘f5 30 ♖e2!

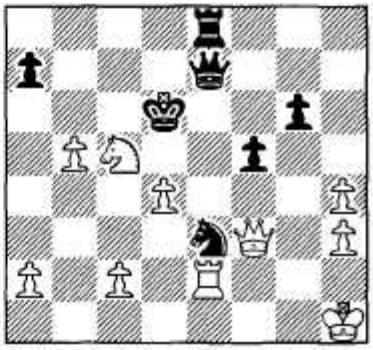


White's rook play is marvellous in this game! 30...♘xd4 31 ♕xb7+ ♕xb7 32 ♖xe8+ ♔c7 33 ♖e7+ ♔c6 34 ♖xb7 ♔xc5 35 ♖xa7 and White wins the ending, while of course 30...♕xe2 allows 31 ♕xb7+ ♔d8 32 ♕d7 mate.

30...♘e3 31 ♔h1

White consolidates his two pawn gain and goes over to the attack. The threat is 32 ♖e3.

31...♔d8 32 ♘xb7+ ♔c7 33 ♘c5 ♔d6 34 b4 f5 35 b5 1-0



The threat of ♕c6 mate wins a piece. A beautiful win by Dr. Hübner.

Game 28

T.Taylor-K.Rogoff

Lone Pine 1978

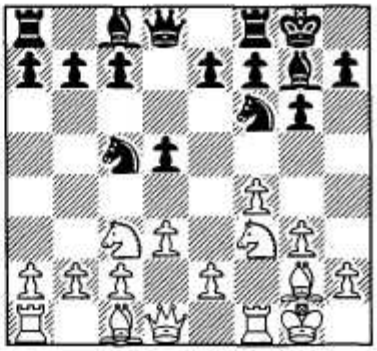
In this game Black does not advance his pawn to c5, rather he uses that square for his knight in a straightforward attempt to prevent e2-e4.

1 f4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 d5 3 g3 g6

Black uses a d5/c6 pawn structure in this game (unlike the customary d5/c5 seen in the first four games of this chapter). Another game featuring that structure is the following, in which Black tries to prevent White's castling but, as in the main game, this far too primitive attempt rebounds: H.Danielsen-M.Hochgraefe, Germany 1999 went 3...c6 4 ♗g2 ♕b6 5 b3 (White exploits Black's peculiar move order to launch a double fianchetto)

5...g6 6 ♗b2 ♗g7 7 e3 (the castling problem is solved) 7...0-0 8 0-0 a5 9 a4 ♘a6 10 ♕c1 ♘b4 11 ♘a3 ♗f5 12 ♗e5 ♖ad8 13 ♔h1 ♖fe8 14 ♕b2 ♘h5 15 ♖ac1 ♘a6 16 d3 ♘c5 17 ♕a1 ♕b4 18 ♘b1 ♗xe5 19 fxe5 ♘g7 20 h3 h6 21 ♘c3 ♖f8 22 ♘e2 ♗c8 23 ♔h2 ♘ce6 24 d4 ♗d7 25 ♘c1 and now we see the point behind White's manoeuvres – with the advance of the c-pawn White will take the initiative across the entire board. Note how the major positional factors favour White, who has the better bishop, more space, and kingside attacking chances via the f-file. All this is sweet music for Danielsen, who convincingly builds a winning attack. The game continued 25...♕b6 26 c4 ♘c7 27 ♕a3 ♖fe8 28 ♘d2 ♗e6 29 ♘d3 ♘a6 30 g4 ♖d7 31 ♖f2 ♘b4 32 c5 ♕c7 33 ♘xb4 axb4 34 ♕xb4 f6 35 ♘f3 f5 36 ♘h4 ♔h7 37 ♗f3 ♖dd8 38 ♗e2 fxg4 39 hxg4 ♖f8 40 ♖ef1 ♕c8 41 ♗d3 ♗xg4 42 ♖xf8 ♖xf8 43 ♘xg6 ♖xf1 44 ♘xe7+ ♗f5 45 ♗xf5+ ♕xf5 46 ♘xf5 ♘xf5 47 ♕xb7+ ♔g6 48 ♕xc6+ ♔h5 49 ♕xd5 ♘xe3 50 ♕e4 ♘g4+ 51 ♔g2 ♖d1 52 e6 ♔h4 53 c7 ♖d2+ 54 ♔f1 1-0. An impressive victory for Danielsen, but one must question Black's simplistic 4...♕b6, which was as though he were playing a beginner and not a GM! As I have witnessed many times, from Greco's unknown opponent in 1620 to the present day, many people have such a low opinion of the Bird or seem offended by its very existence (how dare White 'expose' his king so early?) that they try to refute the opening almost immediately, usually at the cost of their own game!

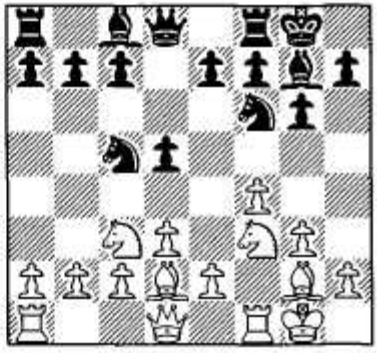
4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 0-0 0-0 6 d3 ♘bd7 7 ♘c3 ♘c5



Here we have a GM playing Black, and he chooses another rather primitive system. Black directly prevents e2-e4 (at least for the moment) but the knight manoeuvres are so awkward that White must be somewhat better.

8 ♗d2

This is preferable to the premature 8 b4 ♘fe4 (8...♘e6 9 ♖b1 d4 10 ♘e4 ♘d5 is also good) 9 dxe4 ♗xc3 10 bxc5 ♗xa1 11 exd5 c6 12 c4 ♗g7 13 e4 ♕a5 14 ♗e3 ♕xa2 15 ♕d3, when White clearly has some compensation for the exchange, but probably not enough against accurate play.



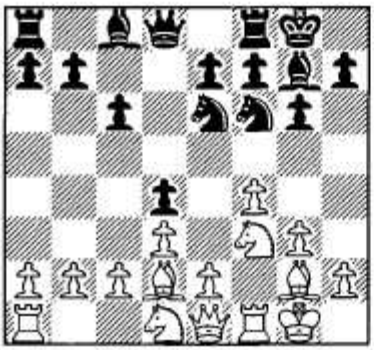
8...c6 9 ♕e1 d4

Black makes sure White doesn't get the usually favourable e4/f4 pawn duo. Alternatives:

a) 9...♘e6 10 ♖b1 (10 e4? dxe4 11 dxe4 ♕b6+ sees the b-pawn go) 10...d4 11 ♘d1 and White has good hypermodern play that is similar to the game.

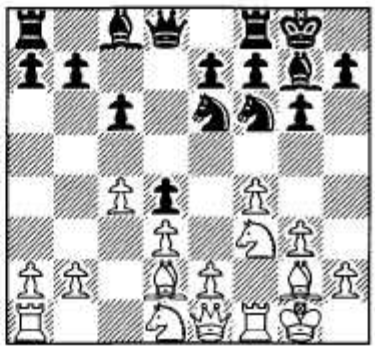
b) 9...♗f5 10 e3 ♕b6 11 ♘d1 and Black's activity looks only temporary. White can play h2-h3, ♔h1, ♘f2 and so on (even ♗c3 can be thrown in), and it looks like a slight edge for White. An interesting strategical imbalance should be pointed out here. If White had played 11 ♖b1 (instead of ♘d1) Black would have the surprising tactic 11...♘xd3 12 cxd3 ♗xd3, when the two pawns plus rook look like they will hold their own against White's pieces. However, with the correct move order, if Black tries the same trick, 11 ♘d1 ♘xd3?! 12 cxd3 ♗xd3 13 ♖f2 ♘e4 14 ♗c3 leaves White on top! Why? The reason is that in the second line the dark-squared bishops come off, so that with this defensive piece gone White will have attacking chances given that he has, numerically, an extra piece.

10 ♘d1 ♘e6



11 c4

White tries for queenside play, but I think that if Black plays correctly (12...c5 instead of 12...♖a6) there is little in it for White. Like Danielsen in Game 26, I got a little over ambitious here! The most appropriate treatment is for White to take the slight edge offered by the consistent 11 e4 dxe3 12 ♘xe3. While it is true the e/f pawn duo has been destroyed, White then has a knight which supports the standard Bird thrust f4-f5, e.g. 12...♕b6 13 ♖b1 ♖e8 14 ♔h1 ♘d4 15 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 16 ♗c3 ♕a4 17 b3 ♕a6 18 a4, with f4-f5 coming soon. This is the kind of edge one can expect if Black has misplayed the opening but has still made reasonable moves (note that once again a GM is unprepared for the Bird!). There is nothing wrong with having a slight edge!



11...a5

Better than 11...dxc3 12 ♗xc3, when the potential exchange of bishops favours White.

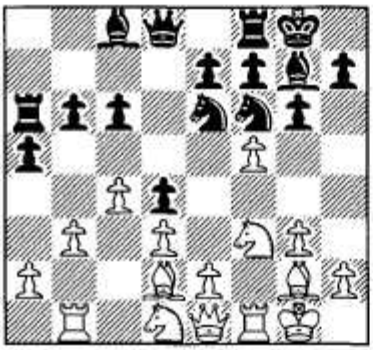
12 b3 ♖a6?!

Black moves the rook away from the danger zone but this doesn't work well as the rook is out of play for a very long

time. Instead 12...c5 brings about approximate equality, e.g. 13 ♘b2 (13 e4 dxe3 14 ♘xe3 a4 with counterplay – note that Black's play is much more efficient than in the cumbersome game continuation) 13...♘g4 14 ♘a4 ♗d7 15 ♖b1 ♕c7 16 h3 ♘e3 17 ♗xe3 dxe3 18 ♕c1 g5 19 ♕xe3 gxf4 20 gxf4 ♘xf4 21 ♘xc5 ♗c6 22 d4 ♗xf3 23 ♗xf3 ♗xd4 24 ♕xd4 ♘xe2+ 25 ♗xe2 ♕g3+ and draws by perpetual check.

Obviously all this is not forced, but the ideas for both sides can be seen. White gets queenside pressure while Black aims for the e3-square and possible kingside counterplay.

13 ♖b1 b6 14 f5!



White assumes the advantage with this classic Bird blow. No matter how Black plays, the f-file opens for White's benefit. Note that as the kingside opens up the disadvantage of Black's badly placed rook is accentuated.

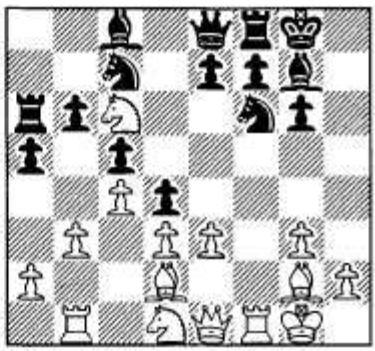
14...♘c7

14...gxf5 15 ♘h4 f4 16 ♘f5! (not 16 gxf4 ♔h8 17 ♗xc6 ♖g8 18 ♔h1 ♕c7 19 ♗g2 ♗h6 20 f5 ♘f4 and Black has alarming counterplay for the pawn) 16...♗b7 (16...fxg3 17 ♕xg3 ♔h8 [17...c5? 18 ♘xg7 ♘xg7 19 ♖xf6! exf6 20 ♗h6 and mates] 18 ♘xg7 ♘xg7 19 ♗xc6 ♖g8 20 ♔h1 ♘e6 21 ♕e5 with an edge for White due to the two bishops) 17 ♘xg7 ♔xg7 18 gxf4 and again White has the bishop pair, while Black's king position is hurting due to the missing dark-squared bishop.

15 fxg6 hxg6 16 ♘e5

This is inaccurate. I miss – in fact both players do – a tactical resource for Black. Strategically, Black is in great difficulties here, with a whole rook not playing and a vulnerable king, which means White should open the game *right away*. 16 e3! dxe3 17 ♘xe3 is called for, e.g. 17...♕xd3 (17...♘e6 18 ♗c3 with typical pressure) 18 ♘e5 ♕d6 19 ♘xc6 ♗d7 20 c5! ♕xc5 (20...bxc5 21 ♘c4 and the pawns on e7 and a5 are dropping) 21 ♖c1 ♕a3 22 ♘c4 ♕xa2 23 ♘xe7+ ♔h7 24 ♖xf6!! ♗xf6 25 ♕e3 ♗g7 (25...♗e7 26 ♕h6+ ♔g8 27 ♗c3 f6 28 ♕g6+ ♔h8 29 ♗e4 and mates) 26 ♕g5 with a mating attack. Note the comical positions of Black's queen and rook, both utterly unable to help their beleaguered king!

16...c5 17 ♘c6 ♕e8 18 e3



18...dxe3

Black misses it! Just for a second a tactic is available that would put Black right back in the game. Instead 18...♗d7 19 ♘e5 ♘e4! (the trick both players overlooked – Black can trade off White's attacking pieces) 20 exd4 ♘xd2 21 ♕xd2 cxd4 22 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 23 ♘f2 e5 improves, when Black is nearing equality.

19 ♘xe3

Now, with the knight in play, Black has no more effective counterplay, but White's attack keeps growing.

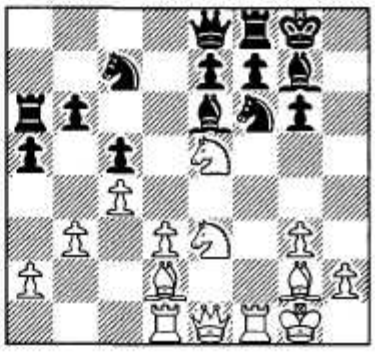
19...♗d7 20 ♘e5 ♗e6

The same trick doesn't work now as there are too many white pieces aimed at the black king! After 20...♘e4 21 ♗xe4! ♗xe5 22 ♗c3 White gets rid of Black's best defender: 22...♗xc3 23 ♕xc3 ♘e6 24 ♘d5 ♕d8 25 ♖be1 ♘d4 26 ♕d2 (not 26 ♘xe7+?? ♕xe7 27 ♗b7 ♘e2+ 28 ♖xe2 ♕xe2 29 ♗xa6 ♗h3 and *White* gets mated!). After 26 ♕d2 there are two main branches:

a) 26...b5 tries to get the rook into play but weakens the c-pawn. White takes advantage of this with 27 ♕g5 ♖e8 28 ♗g2 ♖e6 29 ♘e3, which wins in view of the double threats of ♕xc5 and ♗d5, e.g. 29...♕c7 30 ♗d5 ♖f6 31 ♖xf6 exf6 32 ♕xg6+ with a mating attack, or 29...♕b6 30 ♗d5 ♖f6 31 ♘g4 ♖xf1+ (31...♗xg4 32 ♖xf6) 32 ♖xf1 and the attack breaks through. Note the importance of the open f-file in all this. To make a general statement, here we see the big difference between the Bird and the English. Both openings start with White moving a bishop's pawn, but the 'respectable' English very rarely leads to a kingside attack, and the c-pawn, even advanced, only aids queenside pressure. Meanwhile, the advance of the Bird f-pawn very often leads to violent attacking possibilities against the opponent's king, as we are seeing now!

b) 26...♔g7 27 ♘xe7! snaps off a pawn with continued pressure (that out of play rook sure doesn't help – the point of the pawn snatch is 27...♕xe7 28 ♗b7! and now 28...♕d8 29 ♗xa6 ♕a8 30 ♖e7 ♗c6 [30...♗h3 31 ♗b7 ends Black's counterplay] 31 ♕f4 ♘f3+ [31...♕xa6? 32 ♖xf7+ ♖xf7 33 ♕xf7+ ♔h6 34 ♕f8+ ♔h5 35 ♕h8+ ♔g5 36 ♕h4 mate] 32 ♖xf3 ♗xf3 33 d4 ♗h1 [33...♗c6 34 ♗b5] 34 ♕f2 with a good extra pawn). After 27...♗h3 28 ♗g2 White should win with his extra pawn and attacking chances.

21 ♖d1

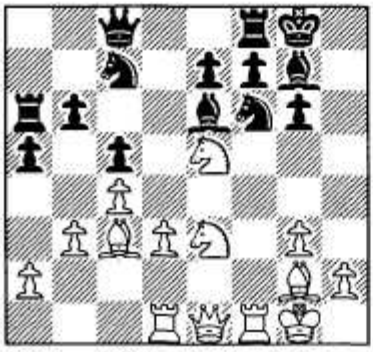


21...♕c8

Again 21...♘e4 fails to impress. With the white rook on the d-file now, simplest is 22 dxe4 ♗xe5 23 ♗c3 ♗xc3 24 ♕xc3 ♗d7 25 ♕d3 ♗c6 26 ♘d5 and the powerful knight can barely be tolerated, yet if Black takes it the strong pawn chain from a2 to d5 will hold Black in a terrible cramp.

22 ♗c3

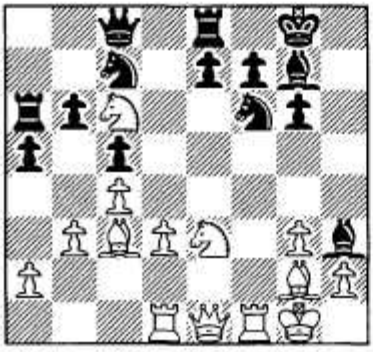
White's position is so active, and the forces so well placed (while Black still suffers from the bad rook on a6) that it is difficult to see how Black can avoid losing material. White has threats down the f-file and also the central break with d3-d4.



22...♗h3

22...♘fe8 loses to 23 ♘c6, when the e-pawn falls as the natural 23...♕d7 is busted by 24 ♘b8! etc. Black could try to activate his errant rook with 22...b5 but then White strikes with 23 g4! followed by ♕h4 and an attack (the classical attack comes when Black may least expect it).

23 ♘c6 ♖e8



Again 23...♕d7? fails tactically – 24 ♘xe7+! and the queen is overloaded.

24 ♕f2?

This gives Black another chance. Instead 24 d4 is a knockout blow. After the forced 24...cxd4 (otherwise the pawn reaches d5, anchoring the knight and putting Black under unbearable pressure) 25 ♗xd4 ♗xg2 (25...b5 26 ♘a7 ♕e6 27 ♗xh3 ♕xh3 28 cxb5 ♖e6 29 ♕f2 ♖e4 30 a4 ♘e6 31 ♘c6 and White is a good pawn up) 26 ♘xg2 (the big threat is ♘xe7+) 26...c5 (or 26...♕d7 27 ♘b8! ♖xb8 28 ♗xf6 ♕e6 29 ♗xe7, snapping off a clear pawn) 27 ♗xe5!! (but not the other way – 27 ♘xe5 ♘g4 and Black wins!) 27...♘d7 (27...♘g4 28 ♖d8! wins major material) 28 ♕f2! (the typical Bird attack, prepared by 1 f4! and 14 f5!) 28...♘xe5 29 ♘xe5 ♖xe5 (29...♗xe5 30 ♕xf7+ ♔h8 31 ♖d7 and mates) 30 ♕xf7+ ♔h7 31 ♖d4 and there are three continuations to investigate:

a) 31...♖h5 32 ♖d6 ♖g5 (32...♖h6 33 ♖d7 ♘e8 34 ♖e1, when an amusing finish would be 34...♕c5+ 35 ♔h1 ♕h5 36 ♘h4 ♕g5 37 ♘f3 ♕f6 38 ♖xe8 ♕xf7 39 ♘g5 mate) 33 ♖f4 with a winning attack.

b) 31...g5 32 ♖d7 ♘e6 33 ♖f6 (threatening ♖xe6) 33...♕c5+ 34 ♔h1 ♕a3 35 h3 ♖e2 36 ♖xe6 ♕c1+ 37 ♔h2 ♖xg2+ 38 ♔xg2 ♕c2+ 39 ♔f3 ♕c3+ 40 ♔g4 and Black is out of checks.

c) 31...♘e8 is best, but White wins nonetheless with 32 ♖h4+ ♖h5 33 ♖xh5+ gxh5 34 ♖f5 b5 (the errant rook finally gets into play, but too late) 35 ♖xh5+ ♖h6 36 ♘f4 ♖xh5 37 ♕xh5+ ♔g8 38 ♕d5+ ♔h7 39 ♕xb5 and White has four pawns and an attack for the piece.

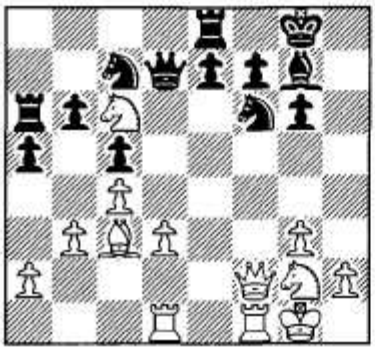
24...♗xg2?

24...b5! activates the rook (which is significant now as the knight on c6 is under pressure since White's important king's bishop is about to be exchanged) and seriously reduces White's advantage. The best I can find is 25 ♘e5 b4 26 ♗b2 and White maintains a tiny edge, but nothing like the classic Bird crush that would have ensued after the 24 d4!, above.

25 ♘xg2

Now White – back in command – wins a pawn thanks to the pressure on the f-file. The f6-knight cannot move, 25...b5 doesn't work because the c-pawn hangs, and e7 can be neither defended nor moved (the pawn supports the knight on f6).

25...♕d7



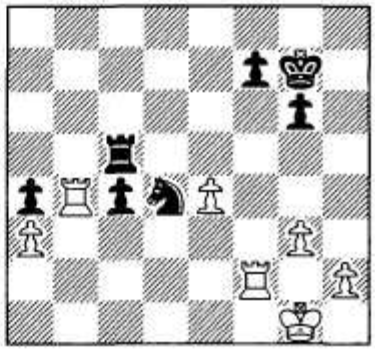
26 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 27 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 28 ♕xf6 ♕xf6 29 ♖xf6 ♘e6

White is a clear pawn ahead.

30 ♖df1 ♖e7 31 ♘e3 a4 32 ♘d5 ♖b7 33 b4 cxb4 34 ♘xb4 ♖a5 35 a3 ♖c5 36 ♘d5 ♔g7 37 ♖6f2 b5 38 ♖b1 ♖d7 39 ♖b4 ♘d4 40 ♘f6 ♖e7 41 ♘e4 ♖xe4!?

This is desperation, as 41...♖ce5 42 cxb5 ♘xb5 43 ♖xa4 sees a second pawn drop.

42 dxe4 bxc4



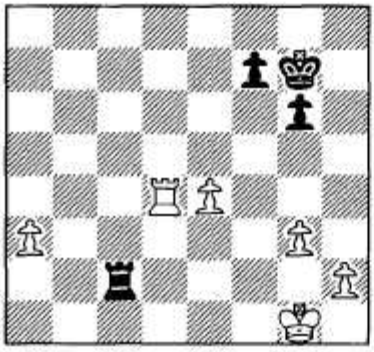
43 ♖xa4?

Black gets away with it! I had very little time, and three moves to make to reach the time control, so I played the safe looking text, which wins a second pawn but leads to a rook ending where White has the inactive rook. I felt that 43 ♖b7 was winning but couldn't calculate the variations in time pressure. However, I should have trusted my intuition and played it, as the variation is a clean win: 43 ♖b7! c3 44 ♖fxf7+ ♔h6 (44...♔g8 45 ♖fc7 ♖xc7 46 ♖xc7 c2 [46...♘b5 47 ♖c5] 47 ♔f2 again with a simple, winning ending) 45 ♖bc7 ♘c6 (45...♖xc7 46 ♖xc7 wins as above) 46 h4! (the key to the position – White plays for mate!) 46...♔h5 (46...g5 47 ♖f6+ picks off the knight) 47 ♔g2 g5 (47...c2 48 ♔h3 and Black can choose how he wants to be mated, e.g. 48...g5 49 g4+ ♔g6 50 h5+ ♔h6 51 ♖f6 mate or 48...c1♕ 49 ♖h7+ ♕h6 50 g4 mate) 48 ♖f6 c2 (48...gxh4 49 ♖fxc6 requires no explanation) 49 ♔h3 gxh4 (49...g4+ 50 ♔g2 c1♕ 51 ♖h7+ ♕h6 52 ♖hxh6 mate) 50 ♖fxc6 c1♕ 51

♖h7+ ♔g5 (51...♕h6 52 ♖hxh6+ ♔g5 53 ♖cg6 mate) 52 ♖g7+ ♔h5 53 g4 mate. Quite pretty!

Alas, after the text White gets only a superior but not clearly winning rook ending.

43...c3 44 ♖xd4 c2 45 ♖xc2 ♖xc2



The rook on the seventh gives Black serious drawing chances, despite the two extra pawns.

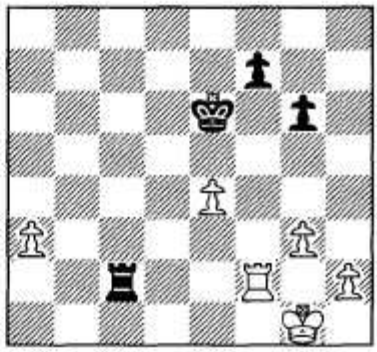
46 ♖d3

Younger readers may not know what to make of this, but 46 ♖d3 was my sealed move. Yes, this was before computers and one session games! The funny thing is, Rogoff, as he said later, analyzed virtually every other try *except* this one, and was so surprised to see this move come tumbling out of the envelope that he immediately blundered!

46...♔f6?

This lets White get behind the a-pawn (rooks belong behind passed pawns) and so White once again gets a clearly winning position. 46...♖e2 is imperative, e.g. 47 a4 (47 e5 ♖xe5 48 ♔f2 ♖e4 49 h3 f5 50 ♖e3 ♖d4 51 ♔e2 g5 and Black heads for the two rook's pawns draw) 47...♖a2! 48 ♖d4 ♔f6 49 h4 ♔e5 50 ♖c4 ♖b2 and White has great technical difficulties.

47 ♖f3+ ♔e6 48 ♖f2

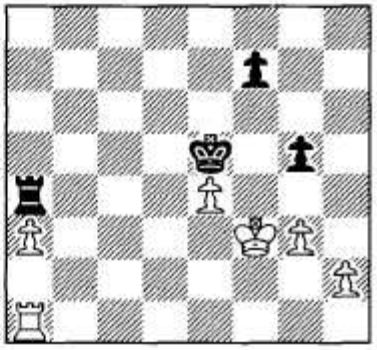


This is the point behind White's play – there is no way Black can prevent my rook from reaching a1 or a2. White is winning.

48...♖c1+ 49 ♖f1 ♖c4 50 ♖a1 ♖a4

50...♖xe4 51 a4 is the classic 'rook behind the passed pawn' win.

51 ♔f2 ♔e5 52 ♔f3 g5



53 h3

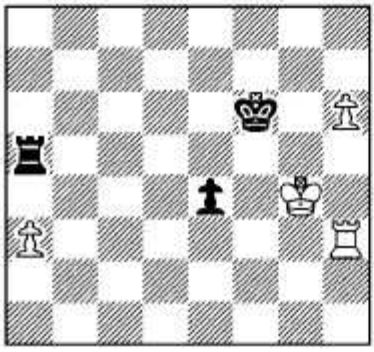
This is certainly good enough but a sharper win is 53 ♔g4 f6 54 ♔h5 ♔xe4 55 ♔g6 ♖a6 56 ♖f1 ♖xa3 57 g4 ♖h3 58 ♖xf6 ♖xh2 59 ♔xg5 (and mate in 33 according to the ending tablebase!), e.g. 59...♖h8 60 ♖h6 ♖g8+ 61 ♔h5 ♖f8 62

g5 ♔f5 63 ♖h7 ♖a8 64 g6 ♖a2 65 ♖f7+ ♔e6 66 ♔h6 and we reach the decisive Lucena position.

53...f6

53...f5 54 exf5 ♔xf5 55 g4+ ♔e5 56 ♔g3 ♖c4 (56...♔f6 57 ♖f1+ ♔g6 58 ♖f3 followed by h3-h4 and it's all over) 57 a4 ♖c3+ 58 ♔g2 ♖c2+ 59 ♔g1 ♖c3 60 a5 ♖xh3 61 a6 ♖h8 62 a7 ♖a8 63 ♔f2 and again White wins due to his stronger rook.

54 ♖a2 ♔d4 55 ♖d2+ ♔e5 56 ♖d5+ ♔e6 57 ♖d3 ♔e5 58 ♖b3 ♖a8 59 h4 gxh4 60 gxh4 ♖a5 61 h5 f5 62 h6 fxe4+ 63 ♔g4 ♔f6 64 ♖h3!



White gets behind the *other* rook's pawn with decisive effect.

64...♖a8 1-0

Now there are two possible finishes after the obvious 65 h7 – 65...♔g7 66 h8♕+! ♖xh8 67 ♖xh8 ♔xh8 68 a4 and the pawn is unstoppable, or 65...♖h8 66 ♔f4 ♔e6 67 ♔xe4 and White wins easily with the active rook and two extra pawns. Consequently Rogoff resigned before I actually made my move.

Despite being rather messy this was my first (but far from my last!) win against a GM with the Bird! Going back to the opening, note that Black's direct method of restraint (...♘d7-c5) lost time and was ultimately ineffective.

Summary

The Leningrad is a well worked out Dutch system, but it's fairly new to the Bird. Players are still trying to find out which anti-Dutch systems work, and which don't. As a general rule I'd say that the sharper the system, the more the extra tempo matters. Black tries these kind of edgy systems in both Games 23 and 25, with no good results. Black should respect the tempo, and if he wishes to play like White does in the Dutch proper, then he should play in very solid, classical style, as in Game 24, when the tempo doesn't seem to make much difference.

The attempt to take the game straight to a drawish ending (Game 26) is very important, and might discourage some attacking players from taking up this line with White, although it's fine if you are happy with light endgame pressure. Finally, the 'recipe' as well as direct preventive measures seen in Games 27 and 28 do not work well against White's sound and active system.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Antoshin Variation

As we have already seen, in many Bird lines White's main positional idea is to prepare to push the e-pawn to e4. The Antoshin Variation is concerned with accelerating this plan, with White trying to push as early as possible, typically using the sequence 1 f4, 2 ♘f3, 3 d3, 4 c3, 5 ♕c2 and then being ready! Once again there are tempo issues. White has a couple of good ways to play against the Dutch Antoshin (two sample games are presented below) but both these lines become dubious when the tempo count is reversed. With this in mind I suggest a different move order for Black in Game 29, and a different development method in Game 31.

Ultimately I feel that the Antoshin is more a sideline rather than a main line. Larsen, for example, has played it occasionally with success, but I think the early development of White's queen is a bit crude, and Black should be able to equalize with best play. On the other hand, the Antoshin can make a terrific surprise weapon – the unprepared player can be dead in the water by the 15th move (Kiselev's fate!) if Black does not take quick steps to counter White's central dominance.

Game 29

V.Babionyshev-V.Kiselev

Kiev Championship 2003

1 f4

Before we get to the main game, let's take a look at two sample Dutch variations:

a) 1 d4 f5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♗g2 d6 4 d5 c6 5 c4 e5 6 dxe6 ♗xe6 7 ♘d2 d5 8 cxd5 ♗xd5 9 ♘gf3 ♗c5 10 0-0 0-0 11 b3 ♘bd7 12 ♗b2 ♕e8 13 e3 ♖d8 14 ♖c1 ♕e7 15 ♕c2 ♗b4 (15...♘e4 is equal) 16 ♖fd1 ♘b6 17 ♘d4 ♗xg2 18 ♔xg2 ♗xd2 19 ♖xd2 ♘e4 (19...♕e8 is correct) 20 ♘xf5 ♕e6 21 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 22 ♘d4 ♕e7 23 f3 ♘g5 24 h4 ♘d5 25 ♕e2 ♘xe3+ 26 ♔h1 c5 27 ♘c2 ♘e4 28 fxe4 ♕xe4+ 29 ♔g1 ♖d3 30 ♖e1 ♕g6 31 ♘xe3 ♕xg3+ 32 ♘g2 1-0, C.Hansen-C.Renner, Bundesliga 1998.

b) 1 ♘f3 f5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♗g2 d6 4 d4 c6 5 0-0 ♕c7 6 c4 e5 7 ♘c3 ♗e7 8 c5! e4 9 cxd6 ♗xd6 10 ♘e5 ♗e6 11 f3! (this is better than 11 ♗f4 ♘bd7 12 ♖c1 a6 with a good game for Black in Zaltsman-Taylor, New York 1980) 11...♗xe5 12 dxe5 ♕xe5 13 fxe4 fxe4 14 ♗f4 (White has excellent attacking chances for the pawn, especially considering the weak dark squares) 14...♕c5+ 15 ♔h1 ♘bd7 16 ♖c1 ♕h5 17 ♕d6 ♗h3 18 ♗xh3 ♕xh3 19 ♗g5 ♕g4 20 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 21 ♕e5+ ♔f7 22 ♘xe4 ♖he8 23 ♘xf6 gxf6 24 ♕xf6+ ♔g8 25 ♖c5 ♕e4+ 26 ♖f3 h6 27 ♕xh6 ♕b1+ 28 ♔g2 ♖xe2+ 29 ♔h3 ♕h7 30 ♖g5+ ♔h8 31 ♕xh7+ ♔xh7 32 ♖f7+ ♔h6 33 ♖g4 ♖xb2 34 ♖fg7 ♖b4 35 ♖4g6+ 1-0, M.Udovcic-W.Lombardy, Zagreb 1969.

The second line is clearly the more dangerous, but it depends on a sharp speculative pawn sacrifice to secure an advantage. With the tempo missing, that idea (c4-c5 for White, or ...c5-c4 for Black) is still important, but the pawn sacrifice is no longer on – I'll cover that crucial line thoroughly in the next game.

1...g6

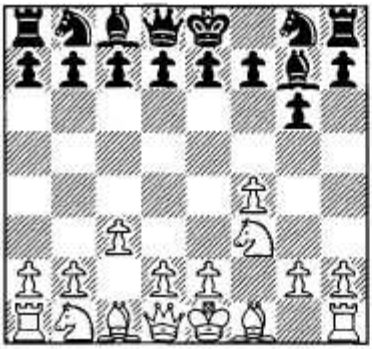
It is possible that the best move order against the Antoshin is as follows: 1...d5 2 ♘f3 c5 3 d3 ♘f6 (3...♘c6 is also good, e.g. 4 c3 g6 5 ♕c2 d4 6 e4 dxe3 7 ♗xe3 ♕d5 8 ♘bd2 ♗g7 9 ♗e2 ♘f6 10 ♕b3 ♕xb3 11 ♘xb3 ♘d5 12 ♔f2 b6 13 d4 cxd4 14 ♘fxd4 ♘xd4 15 ♘xd4 ♘xe3 16 ♔xe3 ♗b7 17 ♗f3 ♗xd4+ 18 cxd4 ♗xf3 19 ♔xf3 0-0-0 20 ♖ac1+ ♔b7 21 ♔e4 e6 with an equal ending) 4 c3 ♘c6 (Black delays the fianchetto; the reason becomes clear in a moment) 5 ♕c2 d4 6 e4 dxe3 7 ♗xe3 e6. Note that since the f8-bishop is not committed Black can with this simple move efficiently cover c5, which is always a problem when the bishop is deployed on g7 (one recalls the debacle of Game 23). Play can continue 8 g3 ♗d6 9 ♘bd2 0-0 10 ♘e4 ♘g4 (C.Garcia Cervigon-F.Draghici, Pamplona 2001, went 10...e5 11 fxe5 ♘e4 12 dxe4 ♘xe5 13 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 14 ♗xc5 ♖e8 15 ♗b5 and Black had nothing for the pawn)11 ♗xc5 (11 ♗g1 might be a better try, e.g. 11...e5 12 h3 ♘f6) 11...♗xc5 12 ♘xc5 e5 with good compensation for the pawn as the position opens with the white king still in the centre, e.g. 13 fxe5 ♕d5 14 ♘e4 ♘cxe5 15 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 16 ♗e2 ♗h3 and I'd happily play this with Black, given the dominating knight and bishop, while White still doesn't know where to put his king.

To recap – what is the point of Black's move order as seen in the above example? The answer is Black plays ...d7-d5, ...c7-c5, ...♘c6 and ...♘f6 *before* White is ready to push the e-pawn, but what Black does *not* do is commit to the fianchetto. This allows the possibility of ...e7-e6 (as above) if Black's c-pawn is attacked. Furthermore, in this line White is unable to get the favourable e4/f4 pawn duo because just when White is ready Black plays ...d5-d4.

Note that Black can safely play what we might call the 'anti-Antoshin' as soon as White commits himself with d2-d3. In other words, after 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 c5 3 e3 the reply 3...♘c6?! allows the strong pin 4 ♗b5 (Game 17), but if White plays 3 d3, then Black can happily play 3...♘c6, as in Garcia Cervigon-Draghici, above.

Now let's return to the main game!

2 ♘f3 ♗g7 3 c3



3...♘f6

If instead Black tries to emulate the Dutch game Hansen-Renner with reversed colours, he falls foul of the missing tempo as follows: 3...d5 4 d3 c5 5 ♕c2 d4 6 e4 dxe3 7 ♗xe3 ♘d7 8 d4 cxd4 9 ♗xd4 ♘gf6 10 ♗c4 0-0 11 0-0 b6 12 f5! and White launches a typical Bird attack by utilizing the extra tempo. White is clearly better, with the threat of fxg6 and a subsequent ♕xg6. I find it interesting that all these disparate Bird variations have so many common themes, and the expanding, line opening, sometimes mating f4-f5 is one of them.

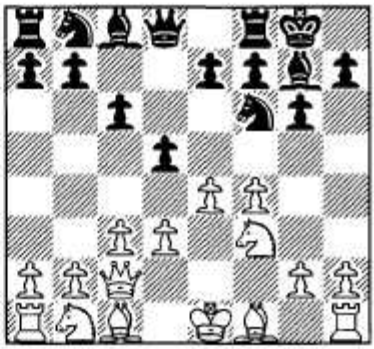
4 d3 d5 5 ♕c2 0-0

The primitive 5...♗f5 (analogous to Game 28) won't stop e2-e4 in the long-run. After 6 ♘bd2 there are two main lines:

a) 6...♘g4 7 ♘b3 ♘f6 8 ♘fd4 ♗g4 9 e4 gives White the typical central pull.

b) 6...♘bd7 (Black sets a trap) 7 h3! (Danielsen style, rather than 7 e4? dxe4 8 dxe4 ♘xe4 9 ♘xe4 ♘c5 and Black recovers the piece with advantage) 7...h5 8 ♘g5 ♘b6 9 e4 dxe4 10 dxe4 ♗d7 11 ♘df3 with a good attack.

6 e4 c6



This is Black's first mistake, and he doesn't have time to make too many more before he's lost! The more active 6...c5 is best and is seen in the next main game, while 6...dxe4 (Game 31) might also give Black a playable game. One problem with Black's seemingly solid ...c7-c6 in this game is that it puts no pressure on White, and an even bigger problem is something Kiselev probably did not consider, namely that just because Black has castled kingside there is no rule that says White has to do the same, and White's king is not yet committed!

7 e5

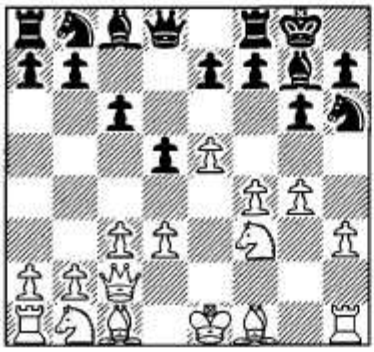
White is already better, with an attacking wedge in the centre that he can reinforce with d3-d4, while Black will have to lose another tempo to attack the centre with ...c6-c5.

7...♘g4?!

Black is oblivious to the danger, this merely encouraging White's kingside pawns to roll forward. Remember that White's king will run to the other side. 7...♘e8 is too passive as White simply plays 8 h4 with excellent attacking

chances. This leaves the improvement 7...♘h5, which sees the knight physically obstructing White's flank attack as h2-h4 not only goes nowhere but weakens g3, too. White should switch gears and play positionally with 8 ♗e2 f6 9 0-0 fxe5 10 ♘xe5, when the knight is under attack and can't jump into f4 – White is better.

8 h3 ♘h6 9 g4!



One would guess that Danielsen is in the house!

9...f6 10 d4 ♘f7 11 ♗e3

White shouldn't become impatient – 11 e6 is interesting but ultimately insufficient, e.g. 11...♗xe6 12 f5 gxf5 13 gxf5 ♗c8 14 ♖g1 ♔h8 and Black holds. The text sensibly develops.

11...♕b6 12 ♕d2 fxe5 13 dxe5!

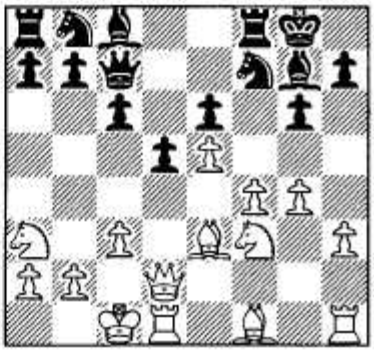
Black is getting outplayed. Instead of the routine capture toward the centre that was no doubt expected, White gains a tempo and creates a dangerous kingside pawn majority.

13...♕c7 14 ♘a3 e6

I'd say it's high time for desperation with 14...g5!? here.

15 0-0-0!

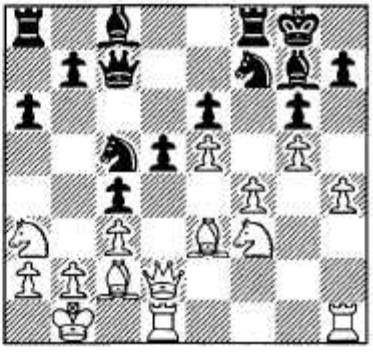
A rare sight in the avian world, but extremely powerful here. With his king safely tucked away there is nothing to stop the kingside majority from rolling onward.



15...c5

Now 15...g5 is too late in view of 16 ♗c5 ♖e8 17 ♘xg5 ♘xg5 18 ♗d6.

16 ♔b1 a6 17 h4 ♘d7 18 ♗d3 c4 19 ♗c2 ♘c5 20 g5!



White fixes the kingside pawns in preparation for prying open the h-file. In fact White is winning, and the rest is good but relatively easy attacking technique.

20...♖e8 21 h5 ♘e4 22 ♕h2 ♘h8 23 hxg6 hxg6 24 ♕h7+ ♔f7 25 ♗xe4 dxe4 26 ♘d2 ♕c6 27 ♘dxc4 1-0

Black resigned to end the horror show. The sadistically inclined might enjoy the following variation, had Black for some reason been obliged to continue: 27...♔f8 (27...♖e7 28 ♖d8 threatens the conclusive 29 ♕g8 mate) 28 ♘b6 ♖b8 29 ♖d6 ♕c7 30 ♕xh8+ ♗xh8 31 ♖xh8+ ♔g7 (31...♔e7 32 ♖h7+ and White comes out a couple of pieces ahead) 32 ♖xe8 (zugzwang) 32...♕f7 33 ♖ed8 ♕c7 34 ♘xc8 and White wins the queen and remains with a massive material advantage.

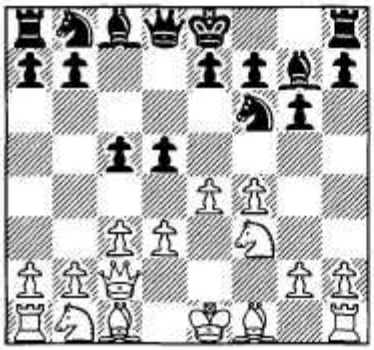
The Antoshin must be respected!

Game 30

T.Taylor-L.Altounian

John Rowell International 2002

1 f4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 d3 d5 4 c3 ♗g7 5 ♕c2 c5 6 e4

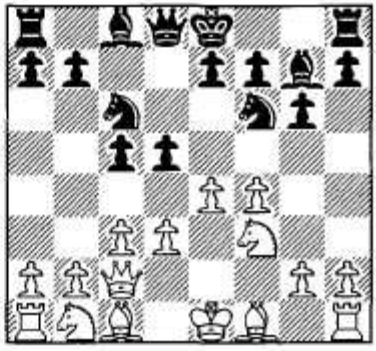


6...♘c6

If Black employs no special anti-Antoshin line, then this is the most accurate way to play. Note that Black waits before castling. The immediate 6...0-0 is dangerous as White plays 7 e5 immediately, as in two Antoshin games – 6...0-0 7 e5 ♘e8 and now:

a) 8 ♕f2 (not the best, as will be seen) 8...♕c7 9 ♗e2 f6 (White can't play d3-d4 due to the hanging bishop on c1) 10 exf6 ♘xf6 11 0-0 b6 12 ♘a3 ♘c6 13 d4 a6? (Black misses his chance in 13...♘e4 with a good game for Black, as attacking the queen while defending c5 is clearly the way to go) 14 dxc5 b5 (Black probably missed the zwischenzug – 14...♘e4 15 cxb6!) 15 ♘c2 ♘e4 16 ♕e3 and White clung grimly to the pawn and eventually won a rook ending in V.Antoshin-S.Kishnev, Moscow 1984.

b) 8 d4 (White simply consolidates his space advantage) 8...b6 (or 8...♗f5 9 ♗d3 ♗xd3 10 ♕xd3 and Black's minor pieces have no scope, while an attack with f4-f5 is looming) 9 ♗e3 ♕c7 10 ♘a3 a6 and here White could have practically put his opponent away in V.Antoshin-A.Sarkisian, Yerevan 1984, with 11 c4!, when the board opens and no satisfactory defence can be found. Unfortunately, instead of this clear solution he chose the complicated 11 dxc5 bxc5 12 ♕f2 f6 13 ♗xc5 fxe5 with an extremely messy game.



7 ♗e2

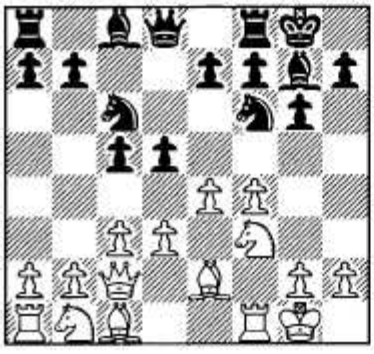
Now 7 e5 looks less promising be-

cause after 7...♘g4 8 h3 ♘h6 9 g4 f6 Black fights back, still not committing his king until he sees where White goes.

7...0-0

The Udovcic Gambit mentioned in Game 29 should not work here in view of the missing tempo: 7...c4 8 e5 cxd3 9 ♗xd3 ♘e4 (9...♘g4 is possible but is more accurate when Black plays the ...c5-c4 thrust on the 8th move, which is discussed below) 10 ♗xe4 dxe4 11 ♕xe4 ♗f5 12 ♕e3 and I don't see adequate compensation, e.g. 12...♗d3 13 ♔f2! and White threatens 14 ♖d1 and stands better, or 12...♕d5 13 0-0 0-0-0 14 ♘bd2 and White is solid. As I say throughout this book, those razor-sharp anti-Dutch lines seldom work in reverse!

8 0-0



This is the critical position. I believe Black has two playable moves, namely 8...c4 (best) and the solid 8...b6. Weaker are 8...d4 and the game continuation, 8...b5. I will analyze these in order.

a) A very high level encounter between the originator of the system and Lajos Portisch, at that time (1965) one of the ten best players in the world, continued with the most accurate 8...c4! 9 e5 cxd3 10 ♗xd3 ♘g4. Note that Portisch has no intention of offering an unsound gambit with 10...♘e4?!, having another trick up his sleeve! By waiting until White castled, he can take advantage of 11 h3?! with 11...♕b6+! 12 ♔h1 ♘e3 and the knight not only doesn't retreat, but effectively attacks, snaring a bishop! 13 ♗xe3 is forced but then comes 13...♕xe3 14 ♕d2 ♕xd2 15 ♘bxd2 ♗h6 and Black wins a pawn, e.g. 16 g3 ♗h3, or 16 ♘d4 ♘e5. Instead there followed 11...f6 12 exf6 (again 12 h3 ♕b6+ 13 ♔h1 ♘e3 14 ♗xe3 ♕xe3 is good for Black), and now Portisch should have consistently carried out his idea and played 12...♕b6+!, which cuts out the defence ♕f2 seen in the game. Black should keep the queens on for an initiative, while White wants them off in order to accentuate his superior pawn structure. Thus after the check play could continue 13 ♔h1 ♖xf6 and Black's active pieces offer full compensation for the split pawns. However, in the game Portisch played the inaccurate 12...♘xf6, and after 13 ♘b5 ♕b6+ 14 ♕f2! ♕xf2+ 15 ♖xf2 ♗f5 16 ♗xf5 gxf5 17 ♘c7 ♖ac8 18 ♘e6 ♘e4 19 ♘xf8 ♘xf2 20 ♔xf2 ♖xf8 21 ♗e3 e6 22 ♖d1 White had an enduring edge due to the better pawn structure, although Portisch hung tough and eventually made a draw (V.Antoshin-L.Portisch, Zagreb 1965).

b) 8...b6 (not as sharp as Portisch's move, but solid and quite playable) 9 ♘bd2 (or 9 ♘a3 a6 10 ♗d2 ♗b7 with only a slight edge for White) 9...♕c7 10 ♘b3 and in Parfait-Tompa, Bagneux 1974, White got the advantage after 10...c4?! 11 dxc4 dxe4 12 ♘fd4 ♗b7 13

♗e3, with good central play. However, Black can come close to equality with 10...dxe4 11 dxe4 ♗b7, when White has only an edge because the knight is misplaced on b3.

c) With 8...d4 Black takes the pressure off White's centre and also relinquishes his influence over the c4-square, something that is not recommended! After 9 ♘a3 ♖b8 10 ♗d2 e5 I gained a small edge with 11 ♘c4 in T.Taylor-A.Ambarcumjan, John Rowell Invitational 2002, but I should have been looking for a *big* plus, not a small one! White can knock this line out with the forcing 11 cxd4! cxd4 (no better is 11...♘xd4 12 ♘xd4 ♕xd4+ 13 ♔h1 as White's threats of ♗c3 and ♘b5 are overwhelming; after 13...♘g4 14 ♗xg4 ♗xg4 15 ♗c3 ♕d6 16 ♘c4 ♕e6 17 ♗xe5 White is a sound pawn up) 12 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 13 fxe5 ♘g4 (or 13...♘d7 14 ♗b4 ♖e8 15 ♗d6 ♖a8 16 ♘b5 and White wins material) 14 ♗xg4 ♗xg4 15 ♗b4 ♖e8 16 ♗d6 ♖c8 (there's no real compensation for the exchange after 16...♗xe5 17 ♗xb8 ♕xb8 18 h3) 17 ♕f2 ♕d7 18 h3 ♗e6 19 ♕xd4 and again White is a good pawn ahead.

Now back to the game!

8...b5

This counterattack is also flawed, but I failed to spot the trick!

9 a4

This is the right idea at the wrong time! I could have refuted Black's over ambitious advance with the accurate 9 e5!, when Black has no good answer:

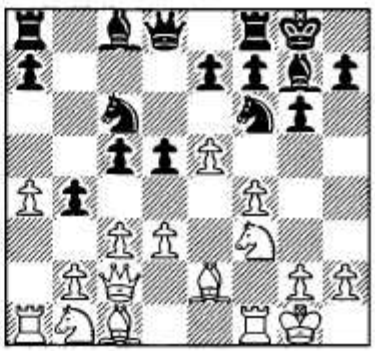
a) 9...♘g4 10 a4! bxa4 (Black has to split his pawns as 10...b4 loses a pawn to 11 cxb4) 11 h3 ♘h6 12 ♕xa4 ♕b6 13 ♗e3 ♘f5 14 ♗f2 ♕xb2 15 ♘bd2 ♗d7 16 ♕b3 ♕xb3 17 ♘xb3 and White wins back his pawn with a big plus. Note how the bishop is shut out of the game on g7, while White is making big gains on the queenside.

b) 9...♘e8 10 a4 bxa4 (again 10...b4? fails to 11 cxb4) 11 ♕xa4 ♕b6 12 ♗e3 with a queenside edge similar to what we saw above, while White's pawns shut Black down in the centre and on the kingside.

c) 9...♘d7 10 ♕b3 and White wins a pawn.

All this seems very easy to see now!

9...b4 10 e5



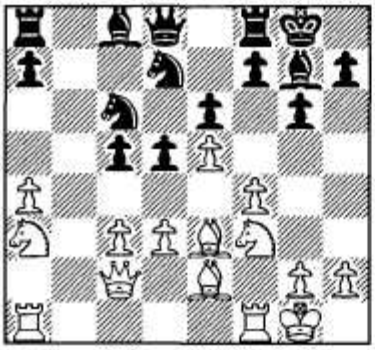
The difference in the move order means that *now* 10 cxb4 does not win a pawn because Black has the tactical trick 10...dxe4! 11 dxe4 ♘d4! 12 ♘xd4 (12 ♕d3? ♘xe4 13 ♕xe4 ♗f5 and Black wins) 12...♕xd4+ 13 ♔h1 cxb4 which ends up with material equality but a positional advantage for Black.

10...♘d7

Obviously ♕b3 doesn't work any more as there is no double attack. Yes, White is still better, but it's just a modest territorial edge. Black's pawn structure is

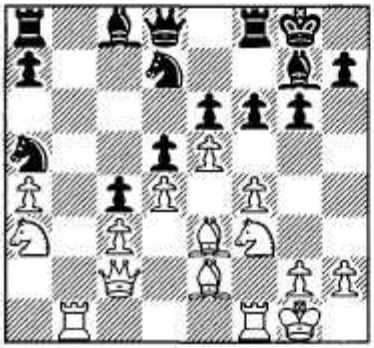
still intact.

11 ♗e3 bxc3 12 bxc3 e6 13 ♘a3



This is rather fancy. I was thinking I could play on the queenside (technically Black's strong side) but I wasn't able to overturn Nimzowitsch in this game! Correct is the straightforward 13 d4 with a nice space advantage. The knight can go to the more natural post on d2.

13...f6 14 d4 ♘a5 15 ♖ab1 c4



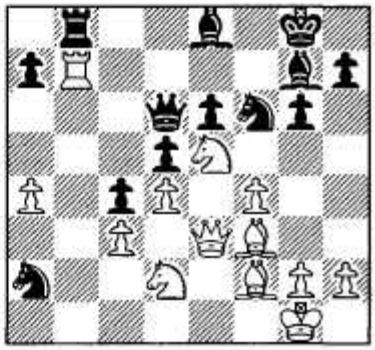
16 exf6

More consistent is 16 ♘b5, when White still has a slight advantage. Now Black is able to generate some play and equalize.

16...♘xf6 17 ♘e5 ♗d7 18 ♖b4

This has a good look about it but, ultimately, leads only to exchanges.

18...♕e7 19 ♗f3 ♖ab8 20 ♖fb1 ♖xb4 21 ♖xb4 ♖c8 22 ♘b1 ♗e8 23 ♕e2 ♘b3 24 ♗f2 ♕d6 25 ♘d2 ♘c1 26 ♕e3 ♘a2 27 ♖b7 ♖b8



We have reached a critical moment in the struggle. White can exchange rooks with equality or try one of two interesting sacrifices – very interesting indeed, but neither gives White a clear advantage.

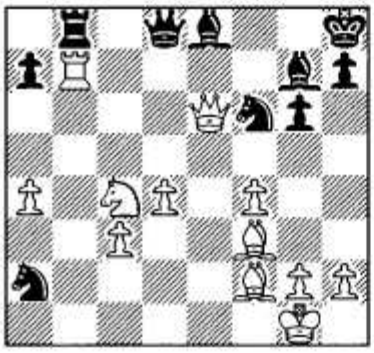
28 ♘exc4!?

This is a sound piece sacrifice inasmuch as White keeps the draw in hand while setting various tactical snares. There's nothing wrong with that, *except* I overestimated it, thinking I was winning! Another clever try is 28 ♖xa7!? ♕b6 29 ♖e7 ♕d6 (there is a reason White lures the queen to this square) 30 ♖xg7+!? (of course White can take the draw with 30 ♖a7) 30...♔xg7 31 ♗h4 and White has a pawn and play on the dark squares for the exchange. The trick, regarding the queen's location, is seen if Black carelessly plays 31...♗xa4?, when he will be stunned by 32 ♘exc4! dxc4 33 ♗xf6+ and a deadly fork on e4. Instead Black should play 31...♕a3 32 ♗xf6+ ♔xf6 33

♘g4+ ♔e7 34 ♕e5 ♕d6 which looks roughly equal.

Finally, White can skip all the fireworks and play simply 28 ♖xb8 ♕xb8 29 a5 (not 29 ♘c6?! ♗xc6 30 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 31 ♕xc6 ♘xc3 and Black's protected passed pawn gives him the better game) 29...♕b2 30 ♗e1 ♕a3 and White's central and kingside play should make up for the pawn he's losing on the queenside. The position, although equal, is never quiet!

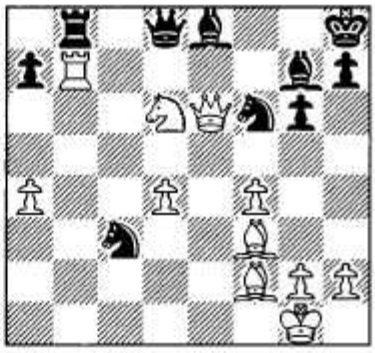
28...dxc4 29 ♘xc4 ♕d8 30 ♕xe6+ ♔h8



31 ♘d6

White has a major alternative in 31 ♖xb8 but this should also lead to equality after 31...♕xb8 32 ♗h4, for example 32...♕b1+ 33 ♔f2 ♕c2+ 34 ♔g3 g5! (this key resource lets Black bring his queen back for defence, rather than 34...♕f5 35 ♕e7 ♗xa4 36 ♘c3 ♕d7 37 ♗xf6 ♕xe7 38 ♗xe7 ♘xc3 39 d5 when White recovers the piece with an extra pawn) 35 fxg5 (35 ♗xg5 ♘xc3! 36 ♗f6 ♕g6+ is good for Black) 35...♕g6 36 ♕e3 and White looks better but isn't! Black can restore material equality (three pawns for a piece) with 36...♗xa4 and hold, e.g. 37 ♘e5 ♘h5+ 38 ♔f2 ♗xe5 39 ♕xe5+ ♘g7 40 ♕b8+ ♗e8 41 ♕b2 ♘f5 42 ♕xa2 ♘xh4 43 ♕xa7 ♘xf3 44 gxf3 ♕xg5 and the ending should be drawn. Of course there's nothing objectively wrong with this for White since the position was even anyway, and Black would have had to find some stellar moves to make the draw. But instead I took another path, also good for a draw with best play.

31...♘xc3

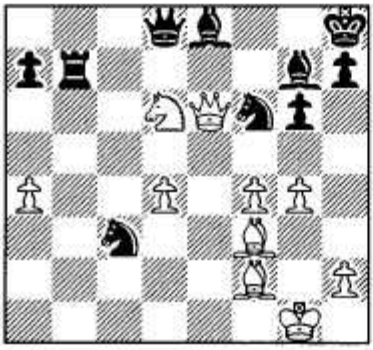


32 g4?

And this is too slow, leaving White worse. White has to take the draw with 32 ♖xb8 ♕xb8 33 ♗h4 g5! (a difficult move to find; maybe my opponent would have fallen for 33...♗d7 34 ♘f7+ ♔g8 35 ♘h6+ ♔h8 36 ♕xf6! and White wins back his piece!) 34 fxg5 (not 34 ♗xg5, weakening White's back rank as the queen and bishop no longer cooperate to defend e1 – Black can exploit this with 34...♘g8 35 ♘f5 [35 ♘xe8?? ♗xd4+ and Black mates] 35...♕b6 and in view of the resource 36 ♕e8 ♕b1+ Black retains his extra piece and stands better) 34...♗d7 (34...♕b1+?? 35 ♕e1 wins the piece back as *three* black minors

are en prise!) 35 ♘f7+ ♔g8 36 ♘h6+ ♔h8 37 ♘f7+ with a draw by perpetual check. Again, a perfectly acceptable result! However, with 32 g4 I have 'successfully' avoided the draw!

32...♖xb7



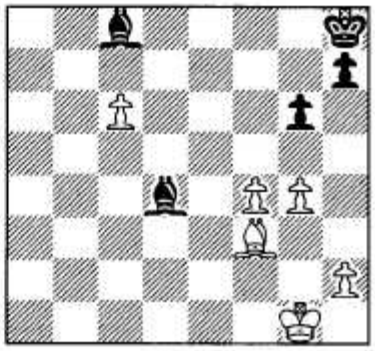
White has only two pawns for the piece and the attack is over. Black is better.

33 ♘xb7 ♕d7 34 ♕c4 ♘fe4 35 ♘c5 ♘xc5

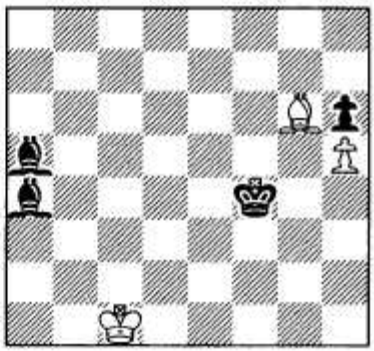
This makes Black work very hard, while I have to suffer at the board much longer! 35...♕c7! was called for, not giving White a dangerous passed c-pawn. Then Black should win relatively easily, whereas now a long ending comes into view.

36 dxc5 ♕xa4 37 ♕e6 ♕d7 38 ♕xd7 ♗xd7 39 c6 ♗c8 40 ♗xa7 ♘b5 41 ♗e3 ♘d4 42 ♗xd4 ♗xd4+

Apparently this ending is winning for Black, despite the obvious technical difficulties. Black gradually makes progress through zugzwang – avoiding 'wrong' coloured bishop draws – until he chases the white king just far enough away. I have to compliment my opponent on his superb technique!



43 ♔g2 ♔g7 44 ♔g3 h6 45 ♗e4 ♗b6 46 ♔f3 ♗c7 47 h4 ♗d8 48 h5 gxh5 49 gxh5 ♔f6 50 ♔g3 ♗a6 51 ♔g4 ♗c7 52 ♔f3 ♗b5 53 ♔g4 ♗e2+ 54 ♗f3 ♗d3 55 ♗d5 ♔e7 56 ♔f3 ♗c2 57 ♔g4 ♔d6 58 ♗f3 ♔c5 59 ♗g2 ♔d4 60 ♗f3 ♗d3 61 ♗d1 ♗b1 62 ♗f3 ♗c2 63 f5 ♔e5 64 f6 ♔xf6 65 ♗d5 ♔e5 66 ♗f7 ♗d1+ 67 ♔h3 ♗f3 68 ♔g3 ♔e4+ 69 ♔f2 ♗b6+ 70 ♔e1 ♔f4 71 ♔d2 ♗xc6 72 ♔d3 ♗b5+ 73 ♔d2 ♗a5+ 74 ♔d1 ♔e3 75 ♗g6 ♗a4+ 76 ♔c1 ♔f4



77 ♔b2 ♔g5 78 ♔c1 ♗b3 79 ♔b2 ♗d1 80 ♔c1 ♗xh5 81 ♗xh5 ♔xh5 82 ♔d1 ♔g4 83 ♔e2 ♔g3 84 ♔f1 ♗b6! 0-1

Black wins by one tempo! A great ending on Black's part. As for the opening, one should pay particular attention to the note following 8 0-0. Black has many ways to go wrong, although it looks like Portisch's 8...c4 still holds up.

Game 31

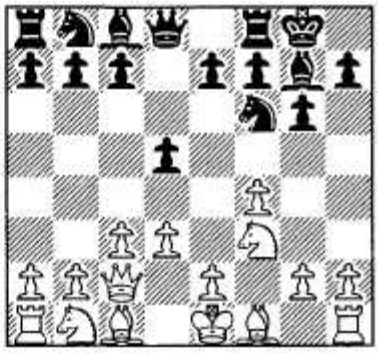
B.Larsen-W.Martz

USA Open, Aspen 1968

1 f4 ♘f6

If Black does not play an early ...♘f6, can White force e2-e4 through even earlier? In a game against Vitaly Zaltsman, Lone Pine 1980, Larsen decided to ask that question, but he may not have got the answer he wanted! After 1...d5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 d3 ♗g7 4 e4?! (yes, Bent gets the centre break in on the fourth move, but at a price) 4...dxe4 5 dxe4 ♕xd1+ 6 ♔xd1 ♘c6 7 c3 ♘f6 8 e5 ♘d5 9 ♗d3 ♗g4 10 ♗e4 0-0-0 Black was already better, since the position is not really an endgame but rather a queenless middlegame, and White's king is badly exposed, constantly subject to tempo gaining attacks. The game continued 11 ♔e2 f6 12 ♖d1 ♗e6 13 exf6 exf6 14 ♘a3 ♖he8 15 ♔f2 ♗f8 16 ♘c2 ♗c5+ 17 ♔g3 f5 18 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 19 ♖c1 ♖xe1 20 ♘cxe1 ♖e8 21 ♘d3 ♗d6 22 ♔f2 ♗c4 23 ♘fe1 ♗f8 24 b3 ♗d5 25 ♗e3 ♗g7 26 ♖c1 b6 27 ♘f3 ♗e4 28 ♔e2 a5 29 g3 ♘e7 30 c4 ♘c6 31 ♘f2 ♘b4 32 ♘xe4 fxe4 33 ♘g5 h6 34 ♘h3 ♘xa2 and Black had picked up a pawn for nothing. This should be a routine technical win for Black but Larsen still had tricks up his sleeve and Zaltsman was in time trouble. There followed 35 ♖e1 ♘b4 36 ♘f2 c5 37 ♖d1 ♖e6 (37...♔c7 followed by ...♘c2-d4 is an easy win for Black) 38 g4 ♘c6 39 f5 gxf5 40 gxf5 ♖f6? (overlooking a simple fork; 40...♖e8 is still equal) 41 ♘xe4! ♖f8 (41...♖f5?? 42 ♘d6+) 42 ♖d6 ♔c7 43 f6 ♗h8 44 ♗xh6 ♖e8 45 ♖xc6+ 1-0. This was probably a win on time, as the time control was on move 45 at Lone Pine. White is better now but the position is hardly resignable after 45...♔xc6 46 f7 ♖xe4+ 47 ♔f3 ♖c6 48 f8♕ ♖f6+ 49 ♔e4 ♖xf8 50 ♗xf8 b5 51 ♔d3 ♗f6 and Black has good drawing chances. A fortuitous win. And Bent did not push his luck – he never tried that opening experiment (4 e4) again, and I wouldn't recommend it to anyone else, either!

2 ♘f3 g6 3 d3 d5 4 c3 ♗g7 5 ♕c2 0-0



If Black wants to transpose to the previous game he should play 5...c5 6 e4 ♘c6.

6 e4 dxe4

Now if Black tries to transpose to Game 30 with 6...c5 White can play 7 e5, like Antoshin, and retain an edge.

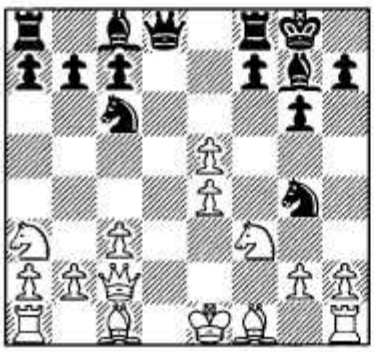
7 dxe4 ♘c6

The knight is not very active here as its advance is restricted by the c3-pawn.

Black never reaches full equality in this game. Even worse than the text is 7...b6 8 ♗e3 ♗b7 9 ♘bd2 c5 10 h3 ♘c6 11 0-0-0 (if this looks familiar it is Babionyshev bashing another opponent into submission as in Game 29!) 11...♖c8 12 ♔b1 ♕e8 13 g4 and Black, already desperate, threw away a pawn with 13...♘d4 14 ♘xd4 cxd4 15 ♗xd4, succeeding only in prolonging the game to the inevitable 1-0 after 52 moves in V.Babionyshev-V.Shianovsky, Kiev 2001.

I consider the rare 7...♘bd7 to be critical. This is the best square for the knight because from here it can threaten White's only weak square, d3. This is seen in the variation 8 e5 ♘d5 9 ♗e2 ♘c5 10 0-0 ♗f5 with a good game for Black. Perhaps 8 ♗c4 is most appropriate, with a likely continuation being 8...♘c5 9 ♘bd2 ♗e6 (9...c6!?) 10 ♗e2 (10 ♗xe6 ♘d3+) 10...c6 and, while White has his e/f-pawn duo, Black has a lead in development. I don't think Black has completely equalized yet, but this line is playable and needs practical tests.

8 ♘a3 e5 9 fxe5 ♘g4



If Black could just take the pawn back with a knight on the next move he'd have a good game – but chess is not that simple!

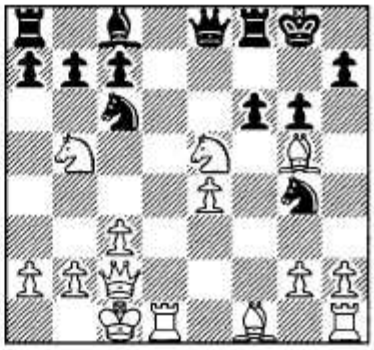
10 ♗g5! ♕e8 11 ♘b5

This annoying threat forces Black to part with the bishop pair, giving Larsen a slight but enduring advantage.

11...♗xe5

Black reaches a playable position, but one in which he has no active opportunities and can strive only for a draw.

12 0-0-0 f6 13 ♘xe5



13...♕xe5

13...fxg5 14 ♗c4+ ♔h8 15 ♘xg4 ♗xg4 16 ♘xc7 ♗xd1 17 ♖xd1 sees White win a pawn.

14 ♖d5 ♕e7 15 ♗f4

'Annoying' is the word here – Black must constantly watch out for White's little threats.

The only reason Black is in the game is White's isolated e-pawn, and this might be enough of a counterweight for Black to make a draw with perfect play.

15...♘ge5

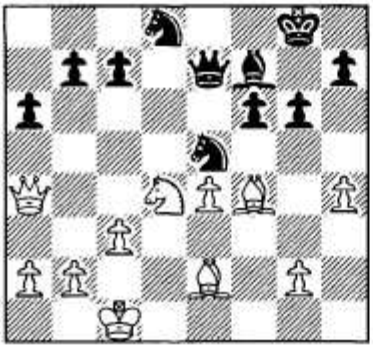
It is imperative that Black maintain control over the blockading e5-square.

16 ♗e2 ♗e6 17 ♖d2 ♖ad8

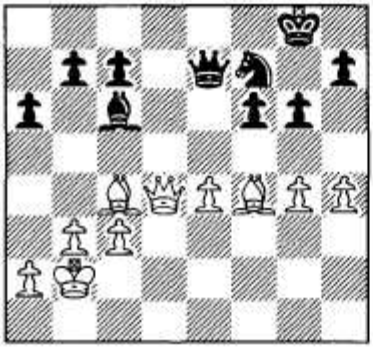
Here and later Black does not dare snatch the a-pawn, as White will trap the

bishop with b2-b3.

18 ♖hd1 ♖xd2 19 ♖xd2 ♖d8 20 ♕a4 a6 21 ♖xd8+ ♘xd8 22 ♘d4 ♗f7 23 h4



23...♘e6 24 ♘xe6 ♗xe6 25 ♔c2 ♔g7 26 b3 ♗d7 27 ♕d4 ♗c6 28 g4 ♘f7 29 ♗d3 ♔g8 30 ♔b2 ♘e5 31 ♗e2 ♘f7 32 ♗c4



From a psychological standpoint it is very difficult to defend this kind of passive position. One longs to break out, to 'do' something rather than just sit there and defend against each little manoeuvre, but sometimes all you can do is hang tough! This is one of those situations. Martz should dig in his heels now and play 32...♔f8, asking White if he really has anything. Instead he can't resist doing something active, and takes a pawn, but this means he exchanges White's isolani for Black's good c-pawn. In other words, White gets rid of his weakness and also finds more room for his bishops.

32...♗xe4? 33 ♗xc7!

Now White is clearly better.

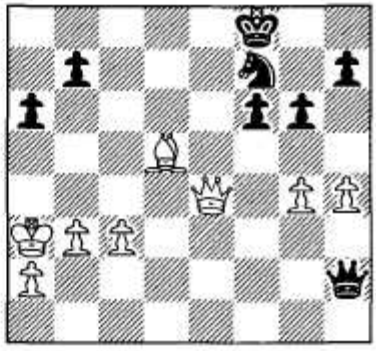
33...♕xc7

Even worse is 33...b5 34 ♗d8 ♕e5 35 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 36 ♕d7+ ♔g8 37 ♗c7 with a deadly attack. As is well known, the opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker, who almost has an extra piece. Here Black can't defend on the dark squares, e.g. 37...♕d5 38 ♕e8+ ♔g7 39 ♗f4 h5 (39...♕b7?? 40 ♗h6+ ♔xh6 41 ♕f8+ ♕g7 42 g5+ and the queen goes) 40 ♕e7+ ♔g8 41 g5 fxg5 42 ♕e8+ ♔h7 43 ♗e5 ♕g8 44 ♕e7+ ♔h6 45 hxg5 mate!

34 ♕xe4 ♔f8 35 ♗d5

With pawns on both wings the centralized bishop is much superior to the knight.

35...♕h2+ 36 ♔a3

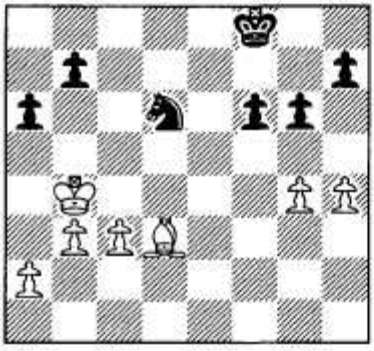


36...♘d6

Neither 36...♕xh4 37 ♕b4+ ♔e8 38

♕xb7 nor 36...♕d6+ 37 ♕b4 is any better than the game. Whether Black likes it or not the position is coming down to a classic match-up of bishop versus knight on an open board.

37 ♕e6 ♘b5+ 38 ♔b4 ♕f4+ 39 ♗c4 ♕d6+ 40 ♕xd6+ ♘xd6 41 ♗d3



And here it is. The bishop dominates the knight, the white king is ready to infiltrate and White has a potential outside passed pawn. For a player like Larsen, that is more than enough.

41...♔e7 42 ♔c5 ♔d7 43 a4 ♔c7 44 ♔d5 ♔d7 45 h5 ♘c8

Black surrenders a pawn in an attempt to keep White's king at bay. No better is 45...gxh5 46 gxh5 h6 47 a5 and Black will succumb to zugzwang.

46 ♔c5 ♔c7 47 hxg6 hxg6 48 ♗xg6 b6+ 49 ♔d4 ♔d6 50 b4 ♘e7 51 ♗e4 ♔c7 52 ♔c4 ♔b8 53 a5 ♔c7 54 axb6+ ♔xb6 55 ♔d4 ♔b5 56 ♗d3+ ♔b6 57 ♗f1 ♘g6 58 ♔d5 a5 59 bxa5+ ♔xa5 60 ♔e6 1-0

60...♘e5 61 g5 is just too easy. This game was certainly no fun for Black.

Summary

The Antoshin Variation is not a threat if Black knows the best move order, namely 1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 d3 c5 4 c3 ♘c6 5 ♕c2 d4. However, I've never had anyone play this against me, and this precise continuation is extremely rare in practice. Furthermore, the 'reversed Dutch' main line seen in Game 30 can also lead to dynamic equality if Black remembers Portisch's exact continuation against Antoshin, given in the notes (8...c4!).

The playable, simplifying line of Game 31 is tough to play for Black, and the potential reward tends to be only a draw.

I would recommend this line as a surprise weapon for White. Even if your opponent knows you play the Bird he probably won't expect the Antoshin! And you might have just as much fun as Babionyshev, since after just one slight inaccuracy on your opponent's part you could soon be castling queenside and crashing through to deliver mate...

CHAPTER SIX

The Stonewall

The Stonewall is solid, but it has two built-in weaknesses: the hole at e4 and the restricted queen's bishop. If White can both effectively cover e4 *and* activate the queen's bishop he can stand well, as in Game 32, but this can't be achieved in any forcing way.

What I've found through researching many Stonewall games is that as long as Black plays calmly it is essentially impossible for White to gain any advantage out of the opening. So why play it all? There are a few reasons. It is often possible to switch into a favourable Stonewall situation from other lines (Game 5 is a notable example). Additionally – and this is the reason I usually play it – the Stonewall can be effective for psychological reasons. Let's say the game begins with 1 f4 c5. You know your opponent is a die hard Sicilian player, not at all opposed to defending the Grand Prix Attack, which could be reached if you play 2 e4. You also know he's a 1 e4 player with White, and thus never plays against the Dutch. So he doesn't want a reversed Dutch at all! But you spoil his fun by continuing 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 e3 g6 4 d4! (the ?! is for prompting a look of confusion on your opponent's face!). After a short analysis, he will probably realize there's nothing better than entering a reversed Dutch Stonewall! Now this is perfectly fine for Black – the Stonewall is such a slow opening that the extra tempo can barely be noticed – but this is one way to force your opponent into unfamiliar territory. Another attraction of the Stonewall is simply for the sake of variety. Danielsen is a true believer in the Leningrad Bird, but in this chapter we see him toss a Stonewall into the mix just for fun!

On a serious note, I will say again that the Stonewall does not, objectively, give White any advantage. Its very slowness and solidity make it almost impossible to effectively use the extra tempo. For once Black can employ numerous anti-Dutch Stonewall lines just as easily as if he were White (note this in Game 34 in particular). For this reason I consider the Stonewall the least important of all the reversed Dutch/Bird systems.

Game 32

T.Taylor-M.Khachyan

Los Angeles 2005 (rapidplay)

1 f4

I think it's very important to know chess history and classic games from the past. I don't think I could have won the present game had I not had the following strategically brilliant Alekhine victory in my memory banks. Alekhine is White – watch his style! 1 d4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 e3 e6 4 ♗d3 c5 5 b3 cxd4? (queried by Alekhine) 6 exd4 ♗d6 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♗b2 ♘c6 9 a3 b6 10 ♘bd2 ♗b7 11 ♕e2 ♕c7 12 ♘e5 ♘e7 13 f4. One can see Alekhine has reached a Bird Stonewall set-up where everything is working for him. The trade 5...cxd4 6 exd4 has opened the e-file, White has a powerful knight outpost and soon the queenside pawn majority and (finally) even the queen's bishop will be heard from! Notice I will use many of these ideas in the main game. Our detour continued 13...♖ac8 14 ♖ac1 g6 15 g4 h5 16 h3 ♔g7 17 c4 ♕d8 18 c5! ('This is the strategical decision, as White forces herewith a protected passed pawn on the queenside without weakening his pressure on the other wing' – Alekhine; compare this to 25 c5! in the main game) 18...♗xe5 19 fxe5 ♘d7 20 b4 hxg4 21 hxg4 ♖h8 22 ♘f3 bxc5 23 bxc5 ♘c6 24 ♕e3 ♕e7 25 ♔g2 f5 26 exf6+ ♘xf6 27 ♕g5 ♖h6 28 ♖h1 ♖ch8 29 ♖xh6 ♖xh6 30 ♖e1 ♘d8 31 ♘e5 ♘g8 32 ♗c1 ♕e8 33 ♖f1 ♗c6 34 ♖f6 ♘xf6 35 ♕xh6+ ♔g8 36 ♗g5 1-0, A.Alekhine-S.Rosselli del Turco, Zurich 1934.

1...c5

It is possible to win in eight moves with the Stonewall – everyone should be aware of the following trick: 1...d5 2 ♘f3 c5 3 e3 g6 4 d4 ♘f6 5 c3 b6 6 ♗d3 ♗g7 7 0-0 ♗a6 (instead of losing a piece Black does better to castle and transpose to Game 34) 8 ♗xa6 and Black suddenly notices the check (8...♘xa6 9 ♕a4+).

2 ♘f3 ♘c6

Black can also go for an immediate fianchetto with 2...g6 3 e3 (I will discuss the alternative 3 e4 in Chapter 10) 3...♗g7 4 d4 ♘f6 5 c3 and now:

a) 5...d5 6 ♗d3 b6 7 0-0 0-0 leads back to Game 34.

b) With 5...b6 Black tries to avoid the transposition to a reversed Dutch. Play can continue 6 ♗d3 ♗b7 (6...♗a6 7 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 8 e4 favours White thanks to his central control – note that White's e-pawn is immune in view of 8...♘e4?? 9 ♕e2) 7 0-0 and now T.Taylor-I.Miller, Los Angeles 2002 went 7...♗e4?!, which is an instructive mistake. Black should acquiesce to the Dutch stonewall reversed, as otherwise White will soon achieve e3-e4. Therefore best is 7...0-0 8 ♘bd2 d5 9 ♘e5 ♘e4 10 ♕f3 f5 with a playable game. In the game Black's endeavours to block White's centre with pieces alone allowed a surprising tactic: (7...♗e4?!) 8 dxc5! ♗xd3 (8...bxc5?? 9 ♗xe4 ♘xe4 10 ♕d5 again snaps off a loose knight) 9 ♕xd3 bxc5 10 e4 and White had more space and decent attacking chances, 10...0-0 11 e5 ♘e8 12 ♗e3 ♕c8 13 f5! generating the typical Bird attack once again.

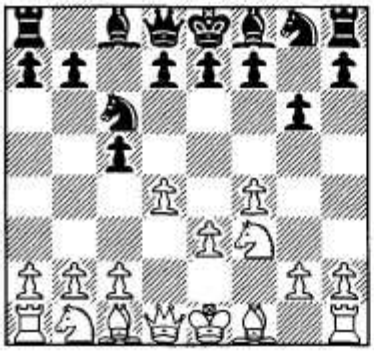
c) After 5...cxd4 6 exd4 d5 7 ♗d3 ♗f5 Black gets rid of White's good

bishop at the cost of doubled pawns. This is a currently fashionable anti-Dutch Stonewall system but, as mentioned in the introduction, I can find no way to use White's extra tempo in this closed structure. T.Taylor-A.Matikozian, Los Angeles 2002 continued 8 ♗xf5 gxf5 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♘e5 e6 when Black's grip on e4 balanced the slightly broken nature of his pawns and made for an even game.

3 e3

3 e4 is again possible.

3...g6 4 d4



4...d5

Practically speaking, Black has only two good choices, namely the text and 4...cxd4 followed by 5...d5. However, if Black is really willing to go out on a limb to avoid the reversed Dutch, there are two more feasible possibilities, 4...e6 5 d5 exd5 6 ♘c3 ♘ge7 7 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 8 ♕xd5 with a pleasant edge for White, or 4...♘f6 5 d5 ♘b4 6 ♘c3 (not 6 c4 d6 7 ♘c3 ♗f5 with a good game for Black in B.Perovic-F.Agnelli, Toscolano 1997) 6...♗g7 7 a3 ♘a6 8 e4 and White has used two tempi on e3-e4 but Black has used three for ...♘c6-b4-a6, meaning White is a tempo up on a Schmid Benoni position, and stands better.

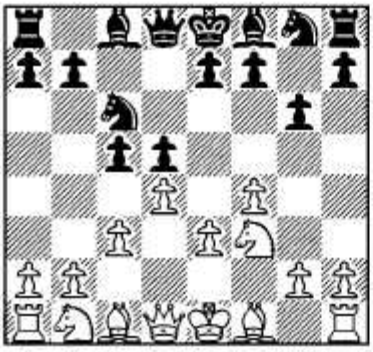
4...cxd4 is fine if Black continues correctly – 5 exd4 d5 6 c3 ♗g7 7 ♗d3 and now:

a) The classical 7...♘f6 is good, and similar to Taylor-Matikozyan ('c' in the note to Black's 2nd move, above).

b) Much weaker is 7...c6 as Black obstructs the bishop for no reason and allows White to build up an attack. T.Taylor-Badger, Costa Mesa 2004 went 8 0-0 ♘ge7 9 ♘bd2 ♕b6 10 ♔h1 0-0 11 ♘b3 ♕c7 12 ♗d2 b6 13 ♖c1 ♕d6 14 ♕e1 a5 15 ♕h4 ♘f5 16 ♕h3 f6 17 g4 ♘fe7 18 ♖ce1 ♗d7 19 ♖f2 ♖ac8 20 ♖fe2 a4 21 ♘c1 ♘a5 22 b3 axb3 23 axb3 ♖a8? (Black should dig in with 23...♘ac6 and maintain an inferior but defensible position, as now the storm breaks!) 24 f5! exf5 (24...gxf5 25 gxf5 ♘xf5 26 ♖xe6!! ♗xe6 27 ♖xe6 ♕xe6 28 ♗xf5 ♕d6 29 ♕xh7+ ♔f7 30 ♕g6+ ♔g8 [30...♔e7 31 ♕xg7+ ♖f7 32 ♕h6 and despite the level points score White's attack with the three pieces for two rooks is overwhelming, e.g. 32...♖d8 33 ♗f4 ♕a3 34 ♘e5 fxe5 35 ♕e6+ ♔f8 36 ♗h6+ ♖g7 37 ♕f6+ ♔e8 38 ♕xg7 with a mating attack] 31 ♘e5 fxe5 [even worse is 31...♖fc8 32 ♕f7+ ♔h8 33 ♘g6+ ♔h7 34 ♘e7+ and mates] 32 ♕xd6 ♖xf5 33 ♕xd5 and White emerges with a huge material plus) 25 ♖xe7 fxg4 26 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 27 ♕h6+ ♔g8 28 ♗xg6 hxg6 29 ♕xg6+ ♔h8 30 ♕h6+ ♔g8 31 ♗f4 ♕c6 (31...♕a3 32 ♕g6+ ♔h8 33 ♖e5! and mates, e.g. 33...♕xc1+ [33...♗f5 34 ♖xf5 ♕xc1+ 35 ♗xc1 ♖a7 36 ♖h5+; 33...f5 34 ♘g5] 34 ♘g1 f5 35 ♖e7) 32 ♕g6+ ♔h8 33 ♖e7 1-0.

c) 7...♘h6 (Black prepares ...♗f5 or ...f7-f6) 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♘e5 (9 ♘bd2 ♗f5 is equal) 9...f6 10 ♘xc6 bxc6 11 ♘d2 e5 12 fxe5 fxe5 13 ♖xf8+ ♕xf8 14 ♘b3 ♘f5 and Black was already slightly better in K.Janik-I.Radziewicz, Krynica 1994.

5 c3



5...♗g4

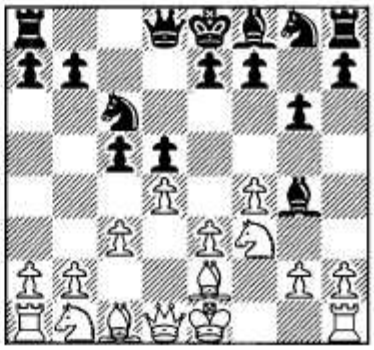
Black has several ways to equalize in this position, with sample alternatives given below. However, the text and its follow-up (taking the knight on f3) is a strategically unsound plan. As Larsen showed as far back as 1964 (Game 5) the Stonewall can be a good system when White has the bishop pair and, in particular, when the king's bishop monitors the vulnerable e4-square. Then White can use his solid structure to prepare attacks on both wings, which is just what happens here. This shows again that strong players (Khachiyan had just achieved his final GM norm when this game was played) do not necessarily understand Bird ideas, and so Black's position starts to slide.

Let's have a look at a couple of equalizers:

a) 5...♕d6 6 ♗d3 ♗g7 7 0-0 ♘h6 8 a4 c4 9 ♗c2 ♗f5 10 b4 a6 11 ♘a3 ♗xc2 12 ♘xc2 f5 13 ♘e5 0-0 14 ♗a3 b5 ½-½, B.Milic-M.Bertok, Ljubljana 1955.

b) Even simpler is 5...♗g7 6 ♗d3 ♘f6 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♕e1 ♗f5 9 ♗xf5 gxf5 10 ♘e5 ♘e4 11 ♘d2 ♘xe5 12 fxe5 ♘xd2 13 ♗xd2 e6 14 ♕e2 ♕b6 with a completely level position in E.Matsuura-E.Tsuboi, Sao Paulo 2001.

6 ♗e2



It doesn't pay to be greedy with 6 dxc5, e.g. 6...e6 7 ♕b3 ♗xf3 8 ♕xb7 ♖c8 9 gxf3 ♕h4+ 10 ♔e2 ♘ge7 11 ♘a3 ♖b8 12 ♕a6 ♗g7 with good compensation for the material, or 7 b4?! ♗xf3! (note how Black eliminates the only piece that can block the long diagonal) 8 ♕xf3 ♘xb4 with an advantage to Black as the knight is immune.

6...♗xf3

Black should generally aim to exchange bishop for bishop (as in Game 34, for example) rather than bishop for knight. After this unforced capture White has the two bishops to go with his solid centre, and so stands slightly better.

7 ♗xf3 e6

Black uses his bishop to protect the c-pawn, but this means the long diagonal

is undefended, and weak squares are apparent on the kingside. However, Black had nothing better, for example 7...b6 loses a pawn to 8 dxc5.

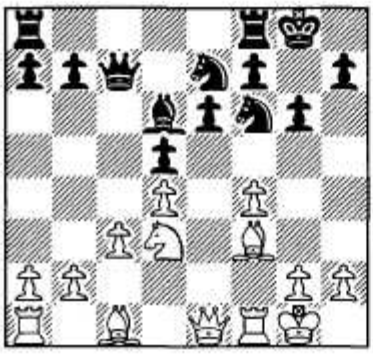
8 0-0 ♘f6 9 ♘d2 cxd4

Or 9...♗d6 10 ♘b3 c4 11 ♘d2 and White can prepare a break with e3-e4.

10 exd4 ♗d6 11 ♘b3 ♕c7 12 ♘c5 0-0

With holes on the dark squares Black should not give up his bishop, 12...♗xc5 13 dxc5 0-0-0 14 ♕a4 h5 15 b4 h4 16 ♗c3 leaving White in the driving seat. After 12...♗xf4 13 ♗xf4 ♕xf4 14 ♘xb7 White gets back his pawn with advantage, and Black has to be very careful with the loose knights, e.g. 14...♖b8 15 ♕a4 with a dangerous attack.

13 ♕e1 ♘e7 14 ♘d3



White has consolidated his position and stands better.

14...h5

This is a risky thrust that weakens the kingside (already shaky from the absence of a bishop on g7), but in some lines this affords Black counterplay on the h-file, and it does prevent g2-g4. The more solid choice is the alternative 14...b5 with a view to drumming up some queenside play.

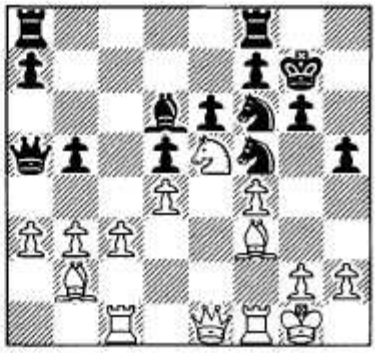
15 ♘e5 ♔g7

The preferable 15...♖ac8 prevents White's queenside fianchetto, but then White maintains a steady plus with 16 ♗e2 ♘f5 17 ♗d3.

16 b3!

Following Alekhine! I remembered his game with Rosselli, and put his plan into practice. First I want to expand on the queenside, then go for mate!

16...♘f5 17 ♗b2 b5 18 ♖c1 ♕a5 19 a3



19...♖ac8

Of course 19...♗xa3?? loses a piece to 20 ♖a1.

20 ♕e2 ♕b6 21 ♔h1

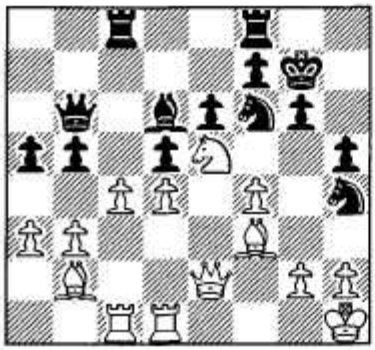
The king on the h-file might give Black something to aim at, so 21 ♕f2 is the more solid way to maintain the advantage.

21...a5

Here Black has to try 21...h4 to get some mileage out of this pawn! Then White must always be careful about ...♘g3+. Now White's initiative grows unchecked.

22 ♖fd1 ♘h4 23 c4!

Alekhine lives!



23...bxc4 24 bxc4 ♗e7

White gets his protected passed pawn because after 24...dxc4 25 ♘xc4 ♕b8 26 d5! the long diagonal opens with deadly effect, e.g. 26...exd5 27 ♗xf6+ ♔xf6 28 ♘xd6 ♕xd6 29 ♕b2+ etc.

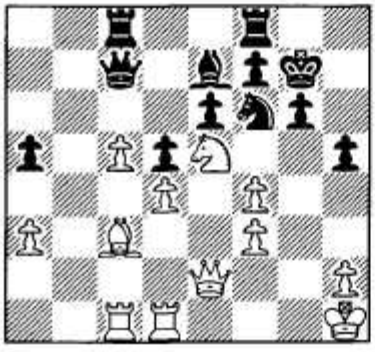
25 c5

The strategically significant Alekhine-Rosselli structure has arisen on this contemporary board!

25...♕c7 26 ♗c3 ♘xf3

Black can't resist taking the bishop, but gets a big surprise! Trying to hang on with 26...a4 is the improvement.

27 gxf3!!



In one stroke White eliminates all Black's counterplay based around the e4-square (the Achilles heel of all Stonewall structures) and opens the g-file for attack. Combine this with the protected passed pawn on the queenside, and White is close to winning.

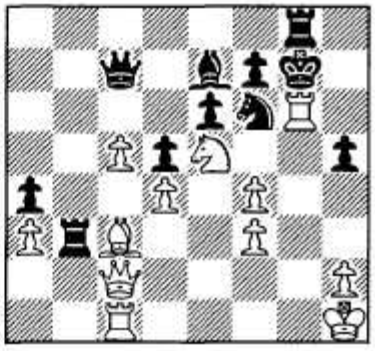
27...♖b8 28 ♖g1 ♖g8 29 ♖g2 ♖b3

Or 29...♗d8 30 ♕c2 ♔h7 31 ♖cg1 with overwhelming pressure.

30 ♕c2 a4

Similar destruction befalls 30...♖xa3 31 ♗b2 ♖a2 32 ♖xg6+ ♔f8 33 ♖xg8+ ♘xg8 (33...♔xg8 34 ♖g1+ ♔f8 35 ♕b3 wins the exchange – for starters) 34 ♕h7 ♗d8 35 ♖g1 ♘f6 36 ♕h8+ ♔e7 37 ♖g7 and mates.

31 ♖xg6+!



This is not deep or difficult, of course, but logical. The accumulated advantages of the g-file, strong knight and even the passed c-pawn now play their part in direct attack.

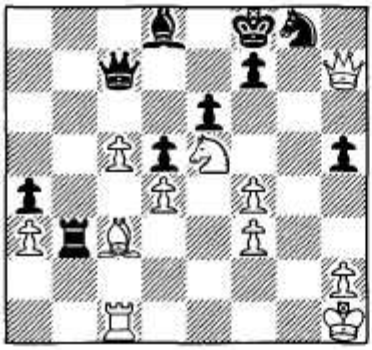
31...♔f8

Of course the rook can't be taken in view of mate in two.

32 ♖xg8+ ♘xg8

Or 32...♔xg8 33 ♖g1+ ♔f8 34 ♗b4 with an extra pawn and a decisive attack (35 ♕g2 is on the agenda).

33 ♕h7 ♗d8

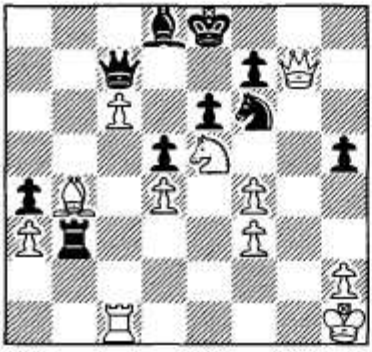


33...♗f6 34 ♘g6+ sees White win at least a piece.

34 ♗b4

Of course 34 ♗a5 wins immediately, although the text gets the job done, too!

34...♘f6 35 ♕h6+ ♔e8 36 ♕h8+ ♔e7 37 ♕g7 ♔e8 38 c6



Introducing a threat of mate on f8. Black must surrender the exchange to prolong the game, but in any case the contest is decided.

38...♖xb4 39 axb4 a3 40 b5 ♕e7

40...a2 41 b6.

41 ♕h8+ ♕f8 42 ♕xf8+ ♔xf8 43 c7 1-0

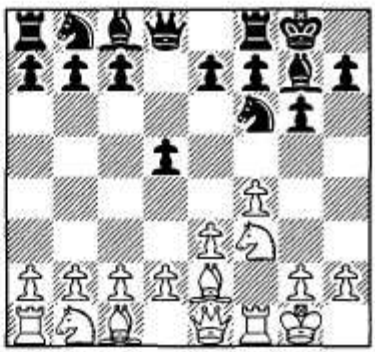
The Stonewall shows its teeth, but the opening notes reveal that Black is by no means short of ways to equalize against this system. Essentially, the reason White got such a plus here was because of Black's extravagant play, namely 5...♗g4 and 6...♗xf3, which helped White better cover e4. One should further note that when White finally got a *pawn* to protect e4 (27 gxf3) the advantage tilted even more dramatically to White's side. Finally, in this day of internet chess, one should not forget the deep ideas of the world champions of the past!

Game 33

D.Bronstein-F.Visier Segovia

Las Palmas 1972

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e3 ♗g7 4 ♗e2 ♘f6 5 0-0 0-0 6 ♕e1



I don't care which heavyweight (Larsen! Smyslov! Bronstein!) plays this move – I still don't like it! And one sees here that the great Bronstein, who tied a match for the world championship, gets nothing out of the opening with White against an opponent far below his class. 6 d3 is preferable, with real chances of an advantage (see Chapter 1).

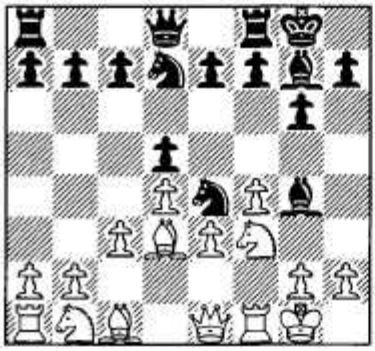
6...♗g4 7 c3

As usual the early show of aggression achieves nothing: 7 ♕h4 c5 8 d3 ♘c6 9 e4 dxe4 10 dxe4 ♘d4 and Black is better.

7...♘bd7 8 d4

The Stonewall appears and, just as quickly, Black helps himself to the hole at e4!

8...♘e4 9 ♗d3



9...♘d6?!

Instead of this unnecessary retreat Black should play 9...♘df6 10 ♘e5 (10 h3 ♗d7) 10...♗f5, e.g. 11 ♘d2 (11 ♗e2 c5 12 g4 ♗e6 13 f5 ♗c8 14 ♘d2 ♘xd2 15 ♗xd2 ♘e4 16 ♗d3 ♕b6 and Black is better in view of White's weaknesses on both sides of the board) 11...♘xd2 12 ♗xd2 ♗xd3 13 ♘xd3 ♘e4 and White has nothing (or less).

10 ♘bd2 c5

There is nothing wrong with this natural move as long as Black is willing to sacrifice a pawn. Since he was apparently unwilling to take such a 'risk' he soon gets a worse position. If Visier wanted a simple life he should have played 10...♘f6 with a balanced game, e.g. 11 e4 ♘fxe4 12 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 13 ♗xe4 dxe4 14 ♕xe4 c6 when White has more space and Black the bishop pair.

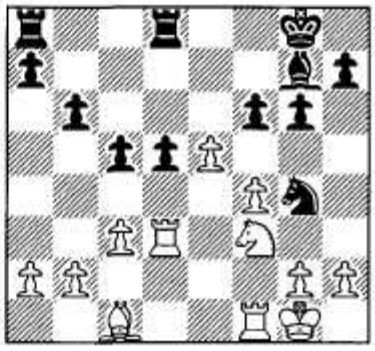
11 ♘e5

White threatens both the bishop and the knight that protects the c5-pawn. Black can meet this actively with the positional pawn sacrifice 11...♗f5 12 ♗xf5 gxf5 13 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 14 dxc5 ♘e4 15 ♘xe4 dxe4, and White's bishop is so bad that Black undoubtedly has full compensation for the pawn.

11...♘e5?! 12 dxe5 ♗f5 13 ♗xf5 ♘xf5 14 e4

I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter that, if White is able to address e4 *and* activate his 'bad' bishop, then he normally gets the better game. This is exactly what has happened here.

14...♘h6 15 ♕e2 e6 16 ♘f3 dxe4 17 ♕xe4 ♕d5 18 ♕xd5 exd5 19 ♗e3 b6 20 ♖ad1 ♖fd8 21 ♖d3 ♘g4 22 ♗c1 f6

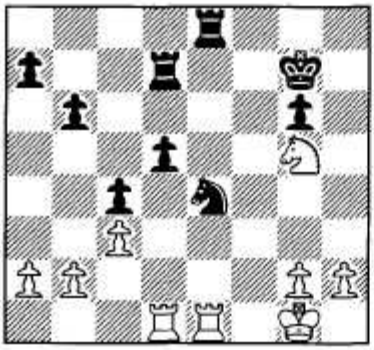


White has everything he could want here, but now lets his advantage slip. He should play 23 ♖e1 with a significant advantage after 23...fxe5 24 fxe5. The central passed pawn cramps Black, and is highly dangerous in its own right. The position is similar to Game 49, with a similarly lethal central runner.

23 exf6?

After this gift White's advantage should not be enough to win.

23...♘xf6 24 f5 c4 25 ♖dd1 ♘e4 26 ♗e3 ♖d7 27 fxg6 hxg6 28 ♗d4 ♖f8 29 ♖fe1 ♖e8 30 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 31 ♘g5



31...♘f6 32 ♖xe8 ♘xe8 33 ♖e1 ♘f6 34 h4 b5 35 ♔f2 a5 36 ♔f3 b4 37 ♖e5 a4?!

37...♔h6 (threatening 38...d4) is completely drawn. White might try:

a) 38 ♘e6? bxc3 39 bxc3 ♘e4 and Black wins a pawn.

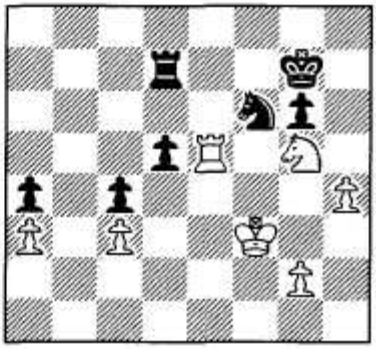
b) 38 ♖e6 ♘e4! 39 ♘xe4 dxe4+ 40 ♖xe4 (40 ♔xe4 ♖d2) 40...♖d2 41 cxb4 axb4 42 b3 (42 ♖xc4 ♖xb2 43 g4 ♖xa2 44 ♖xb4 is a book draw) 42...c3 43 ♖xb4 ♖xa2 44 ♖c4 c2 45 ♔f4 ♖b2 46 g4 ♖xb3 47 ♖xc2 ♖b4+ 48 ♔f3 ♖b3+ 49 ♔g2 ♖b4 is likewise dead.

c) 38 g4 d4 39 ♘e6 ♘xg4! 40 ♔xg4 d3 41 ♖c1 ♖e7 42 ♔f4 d2 43 ♖d1 ♖xe6 44 ♖xd2 ♖f6+ 45 ♔g4 ♖f1 46 cxb4 axb4 47 ♖c2 ♖g1+ 48 ♔h3 ♖b1 49 ♔g4 b3 50 axb3 cxb3 51 ♖g2 ♖c1 52 ♖g3 ♖c4+ 53 ♔h3 ♖b4 with yet another shared point.

38 a3

White can risk 38 cxb4!? d4 despite this allowing the creation of a dangerous passed pawn: 39 ♘e6+ ♔f7 40 ♘c5 ♖d6 41 a3 d3 42 ♖c1 with some winning chances.

38...bxa3 39 bxa3



Instead of the logical 39...♖b7 with the idea of ...♖b3 and an easy draw, Black now throws away a pawn!

39...♘e4?? 40 ♘xe4 dxe4+ 41 ♖xe4 ♖d3+ 42 ♖e3

White has a good extra pawn and should win.

42...♖d2 43 g4 ♔f6 44 ♔e4 ♖a2 45 g5+?

This allows a hidden drawing resource. 45 ♔d5 wins.

45...♔f7?

Black now loses thanks to his poor king position. It is regrettable that Black missed the problem-like draw with 45...♔e6!, when the main line runs 46 ♔d4+ ♔f5 47 ♔xc4 ♖xa3 48 ♔b4 ♖a2 49 ♖d3 ♔g4! 50 ♖d4+ ♔h5 and – with this key resource! – Black stalemates his king. Note that Black got this chance only because of White's mistaken 45 g5+, which let the king slip in around the pawns. Play might continue 51 c4 ♖b2+! 52 ♔xa4 ♖b4+ 53 ♔a5 ♖b5+ 54 ♔a6

♖b6+ with a draw by perpetual check or stalemate, while freeing the king also draws: 51 ♖d6 ♖a1 52 c4 a3 53 ♔b3 ♖c1 54 ♖a6 ♔xh4 55 ♖xg6 a2 56 ♔xa2 ♖xc4 57 ♖g8 ♖g4 58 g6 ♔h5 59 g7 ♔h6 and soon only kings will be left.

46 ♔d5 ♖xa3 47 ♔xc4 ♖b3 48 ♖f3+ ♔g7 49 ♖f6 ♖b2 50 ♖a6 ♖h2 51 ♖xa4 ♖xh4+ 52 ♔b3 ♖h5 53 ♖a5 ♔f7 54 ♖e5+

Black's king is cut off, and there are no more defensive resources.

54...♖h8 55 c4 1-0

Certainly the ending was more interesting than the opening! Once again Black had multiple ways to equalize.

Game 34

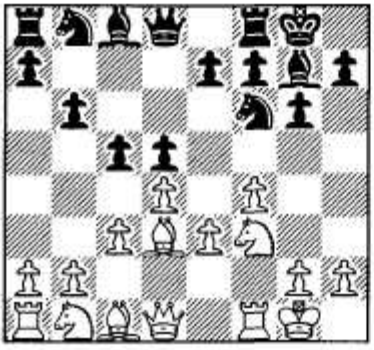
H.Danielsen-B.Halldorsson

Reykjavik Open 2002

1 f4 d5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e3

No 3 g3 today! I pity his opponent, who had probably looked at a hundred Leningrads the night before!

3...♗g7 4 d4 ♘f6 5 ♗d3 0-0 6 0-0 c5 7 c3 b6



A very solid move. Black defends his c-pawn and – even more important – White can't avoid the exchange of his good bishop. But unlike the possible exchange on f5, Black doesn't weaken his pawns. One can already assess the position as equal.

8 ♕e2 a5 9 ♘bd2 e6

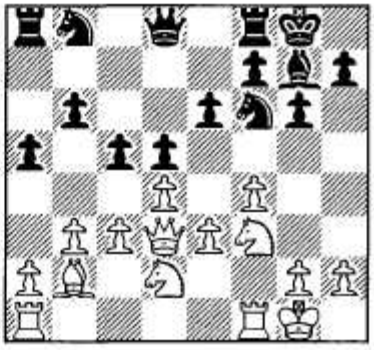
There is no reason to wait. 9...♗a6 is best, and now:

a) 10 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 11 e4 dxe4 12 ♘xe4 cxd4 is equal.

b) 10 e4 dxe4 11 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 12 ♕xe4 ♗xd3 13 ♕xd3 cxd4 14 ♕e4 ♘d7 15 ♘xd4 ♘c5 16 ♕e3 ♕d5 17 f5 ♖ad8 18 ♕xe7 ♗xd4+ 19 cxd4 ♖fe8 20 ♕h4 ♕xd4+ 21 ♕xd4 ♖xd4 and Black is a little better thanks to his lead in development.

c) 10 b3 ♗xd3 11 ♕xd3 a4 12 ♗a3 ♘bd7 13 ♘e5 ♕c7 14 e4 dxe4 15 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 16 ♕xe4 ♘f6 17 ♕f3 ♖fd8 with another equality.

10 b3 ♗a6 11 ♗b2 ♗xd3 12 ♕xd3



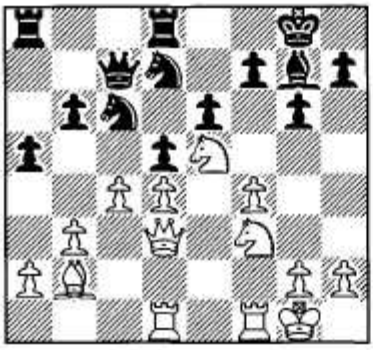
12...♘fd7

Why this extravagance? The simple move 12...♘bd7 is equal.

13 c4 ♘c6 14 ♖ad1 ♕c7

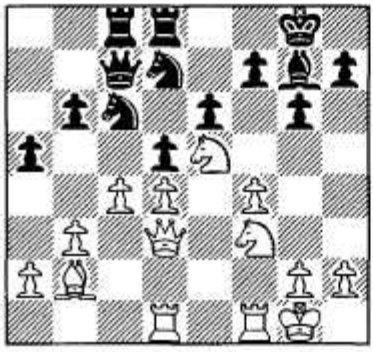
Counterplay with 14...a4 is the easiest way to keep matters even.

15 ♘e5 ♖fd8 16 ♘df3 cxd4 17 exd4



17...♖ac8?

A terrible blunder! Black misses White's simple threat (maybe because White hasn't threatened anything thus far!). If Black had been awake he would have noticed the danger to f7 and consequently played 17...h6 when, despite Black's inaccuracies, it's absolutely unclear that White has anything! After all, the white bishop is still not really playing and Black has potential counterplay with ...a5-a4.



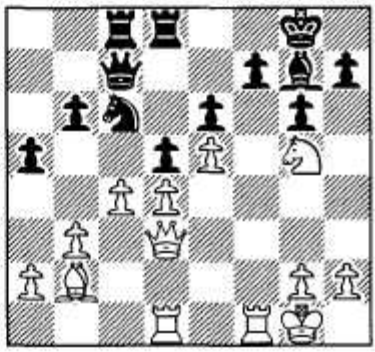
18 ♘g5

Now it's all over.

18...♘dxe5

This is forced, as can be seen in the following line: 18...♖f8 19 cxd5 exd5 20 ♕h3 ♘f6 (20...h6 21 ♘xd7!) 21 ♖c1 ♕b7 22 ♘gxf7 ♖xf7 23 ♕e6 and White wins at least the exchange.

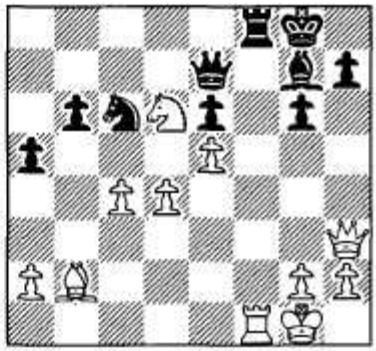
19 fxe5



19...♕e7

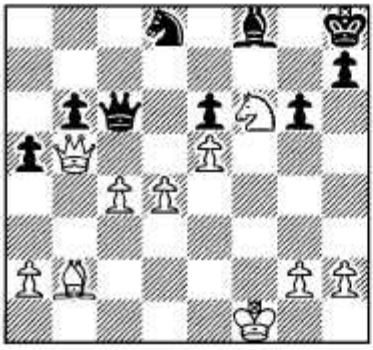
19...♖d7 loses in entertaining fashion: 20 cxd5 exd5 21 ♕h3 h6 (21...h5 22 e6 fxe6 23 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 24 ♕xg6 is too easy) 22 e6 fxe6 23 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 24 ♖d3! ♘e7 25 ♖c3! ♕b7 (25...♗xd4+ 26 ♔h1 ♗xc3 27 ♖f7! ♘f5 [27...hxg5 28 ♕h3+ ♔g8 29 ♕h7 mate] 28 ♖xd7 ♘g7 29 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 30 ♕xb6 ♖c8 31 ♗xc3 hxg5 32 ♗xg7+ ♔h7 33 ♗b2 ♖c2 34 ♕d4 ♖xb2 35 ♕xb2 wins) 26 ♖f7 ♖c6 27 ♖xc6 ♕xc6 28 ♖xg7 and wins a piece.

20 ♘xf7 dxc4 21 ♕h3! ♖f8 22 ♘d6 ♖xf1+ 23 ♖xf1 ♖f8 24 bxc4



White's last few moves were very accurate. Danielsen has consolidated, with an extra pawn and the better position.

24...♖xf1+ 25 ♔xf1 ♘d8 26 ♕f3 ♕c7 27 ♕b3 ♗f8 28 ♘e8 ♕c6 29 ♘f6+ ♔h8 30 ♕b5!



White demonstrates nice technique – if the queen is taken, Black loses a second pawn.

30...♕c7 31 ♕d7 ♕xc4+ 32 ♔g1 1-0

As we have seen numerous times before, once Danielsen gets on the attack he's unstoppable. But what is more interesting is that the big D, just like Bronstein before him, could get no legitimate opening advantage with the Stonewall.

Summary

There are certain favourable Stonewall positions, for example Alekhine-Rosselli, Larsen-Spassky or – one may recall – Malaniuk-Sulskis from Chapter 3. However, to reach these favourable positions requires mistakes from your opponent. If Black plays good, solid chess he can equalize against the Stonewall, even if his opponent is Bronstein! But of course, surviving the ending is a different story...

PART TWO

From's Gambit

The From's Gambit is a blunt attempt to refute Bird's Opening. Severin From, incidentally, was the first great Danish player, and he obviously loved sharp play as he also left us the Danish Gambit. Black sacrifices a centre pawn on the first move, and a couple of moves later introduces a mate threat! The opening sequence goes 1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 ♗xd6, when White's only good move is 4 ♘f3 and play subsequently diverges into the Lasker Variation (4...g5), featured in Chapter 7, what I am calling the Mestel Variation (4...♘f6), which is dealt with in Chapter 8 and other Froms (the very new 2...♘c6 line and Danielsen's method of declining the gambit) that can be found in Chapter 9.

Note that the simplest way of avoiding From's Gambit (but you'll have to get another opening book to study it) is to play 2 e4 and make your opponent deal with your King's Gambit! I say that requires another book, but it is more like another dozen books, so it's on to the From!

CHAPTER SEVEN

From's Gambit: Lasker Variation

I wouldn't say that this line is completely refuted yet but it's certainly in a bad way, and the prognosis is not good! The Lasker Variation occurs after 1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 ♗d6 4 ♘f3 g5, threatening 5...g4 to renew the mate theme. Basically the Lasker is a succession of one move threats – sometimes very fancy, but one-movers nonetheless. Meanwhile, Black is making holes in his position with drastic pawn moves.

While this strategy worked in the 19th century, such direct play makes a poor impression in the 21st, and the Lasker is taking a savage beating these days. One should note that Lasker played this variation *once,* probably for surprise value, during his match with Bird – and never played it again. I am not so sure he really believed in the variation that came to bear his name.

I see no way for Black to equalize with 4...g5, while White often has a couple of different routes to an advantage. Unless improvements are found, I see this line gradually disappearing from the scene.

The first three games of this chapter (35-37) show White obtaining an advantage against variations in the main line (5 g3). Game 38 sees the Romanian IM Berescu reviving Bird's original continuation against Lasker, and finding a new path to an endgame advantage for White. Game 39 – for the purposes of completion – features the refutation of the old 6 ♘g5 piece sacrifice. White should leave this line to the last century.

Game 35

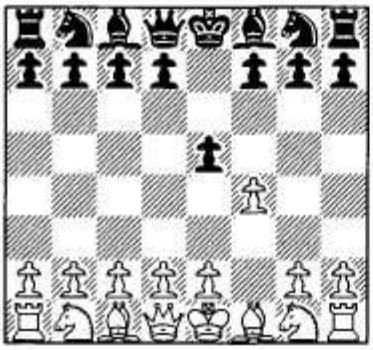
T.Taylor-J.Becerra Rivero

HB Global, Minneapolis 2005

1 f4 e5

Here's a personal note on the condition of this game, which was played in the last round of the huge HB Global Chess Challenge. A win for me meant a very large (by chess standards) sum of money, while a loss or a draw meant nothing. Likewise for my opponent. This was my fifth Bird's Opening (every time I had White) in this nine round tourna-

ment. Up to now, every opponent had looked askance at what they considered my strange first move, and all had hesitated several minutes before replying. However, there was no surprise left by the last round. GM Becerra calmly registered my expected first move, and immediately pushed his e-pawn forward with a bold motion. I, delighted to see such a toothsome centre pawn, chopped it off!



2 fxe5 d6

For the new alternative, 2...♘c6, see Chapter 9.

3 exd6 ♗xd6 4 ♘f3

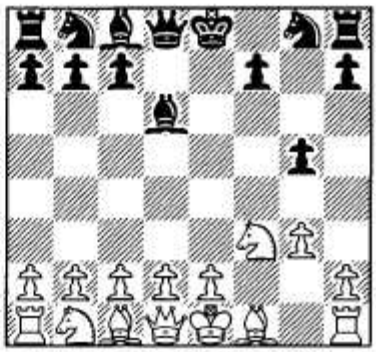
The best answer to the mate threat. The only other real try is 4 g3, but this is simply weak as it invites direct attack with 4...h5!, e.g. 5 ♘f3 h4 6 ♖g1 hxg3 7 hxg3 ♖h1! and Black was already clearly better in A.Busse-H.Grau, Crailsheim 2000.

4...g5

'The move 4...g5 is not to my taste. I believe that White can answer 5 g3' – Bent Larsen in his book *Selected Games*.

5 g3

Right on, Bent! White meets the mate threat and 5...h5 is too slow now with the white knight out, as the following quick kill shows: 5....h5?! 6 d4 f6 7 ♕d3 h4 8 ♕g6+ ♔f8 9 ♘xg5! and White was winning in J.Horvath-P.Velvart, Hungarian Women's Championship 1993. For the older but good 5 d4 see Games 38 and 39.



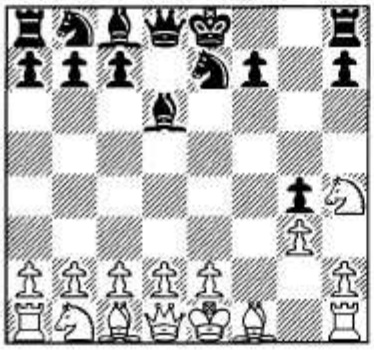
5...g4

The usual move, but Danielsen once faced the slower 5...♘c6. He played 6 ♘c3 (also good for White is 6 ♗g2 g4 7 ♘h4 ♗e7 8 ♗xc6+ bxc6 9 ♘g2) 6...g4 7 ♘h4 ♗e7 (in general, if Black doesn't find a quick knockout he can face a slow death, for example after 7...♘ge7 8 ♗g2 ♘g6 9 ♘xg6 hxg6 10 ♘e4 White is better with his extra pawn) 8 ♘g2 h5 9 ♘f4 h4 10 ♗g2 hxg3 11 hxg3 ♖xh1+ 12 ♗xh1 ♕d4 (12..♗h4 13 ♔f2) 13 e3 ♕h8 14 ♗xc6+ bxc6 15 ♕e2 and Black had nothing for the pawn in H.Danielsen-R.Stern, Germany 2002.

6 ♘h4 ♘e7

This idea of Spielmann's – to play ...♘g6 with a view to opening the h-file – is the main line, but now seems insufficient. For the even more direct 6...♗e7 see Game 37. Since neither of Games 35 and 36 is producing the results Black

wants, this might be a good place to look for an improvement – this opening is still very much unexplored, after all!



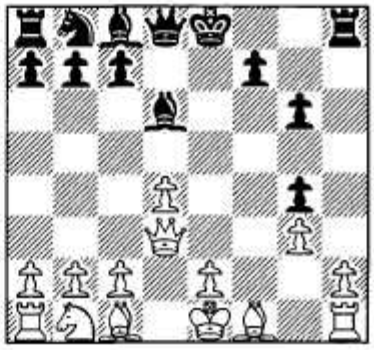
7 d4

I had no objection to following the main line, which I regarded as favourable, and my opponent still looked happy. A playable alternative for White is 7 e4 ♘g6 8 ♘f5, but weaker is 7 ♘c3 ♘g6 8 ♘xg6 hxg6 9 ♘e4 ♗e5 10 e3 f5 11 ♘f2 ♕d5 12 e4 fxe4 13 ♗g2 ♗f5 14 d3 ♕a5+ 15 ♗d2 ♕b6 16 dxe4 ♗e6 17 ♕e2 ♘c6 18 ♗e3 ♕xb2 and Black was better in S.Agdestein-R.Cifuentes Parada, Tilburg 1993.

7...♘g6 8 ♘xg6

This capture is simple and good. White doesn't fear the open h-file as Black's play is based only on the one move tricks I mentioned, and the well prepared player should know how to avoid them (so pay close attention!). Another good line for White is the more complicated 8 ♘g2 ♘c6 9 c3 h5 10 e4 h4 11 e5 ♗e7 12 ♖g1 hxg3 13 hxg3 ♖h2 14 ♗e3 ♗f5 15 ♘d2 ♗g5 16 ♕e2, when White consolidated and went on to win in B.Larsen-C.Zuidema, Beverwijk 1964.

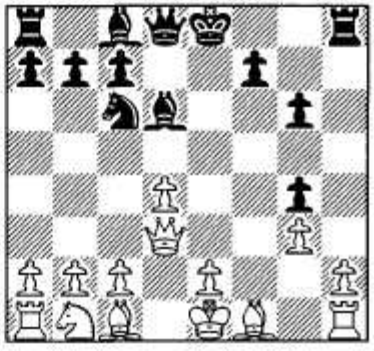
8...hxg6 9 ♕d3



Again this is best. In fact ♕d3 is a characteristic defensive/aggressive move in the From. Note that White avoids both of Black's tricks – of course the obvious one is ...♗xg3+, exploiting the undefended rook, but if you're careless and play 9 ♗g2??, then 9...♖xh2! 10 ♖xh2 ♗xg3+ will be a most unpleasant surprise.

9...♘c6

Two novel tries to save Black's gambit are 9...♖h5 and 9...♘a6, both stemming from the inventive mind of my friend Joe Cepiel. I think White can answer the former with 10 ♗g2 and the latter with 10 c3, and I don't see adequate compensation in either, but these lines need practical testing.



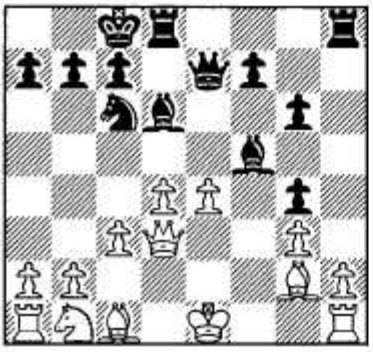
10 c3

Black had a new one move threat! If White unwarily develops with 10 ♘c3? Black drops the bomb with 10...♘xd4!, the point being, of course, that 11 ♕xd4?? runs into 11...♗xg3+. But who falls for such tricks nowadays?

10...♕e7

Although not a new move, this was Becerra's first deviation from the main *ECO* line which continues with the direct 10...♗f5 11 e4 ♕e7 12 ♗g2 0-0-0 and is accompanied with a verdict of unclear. However, I would say the dust has cleared over the last few years, and this variation can now be seen to clearly favour White, who has a big centre and an extra pawn. Basically, White has to avoid a few more tricks, and then Black will have to suffer.

Here are the main variations after 12...0-0-0



To understand this position let's first look at some mistakes for White.

a) White should keep an open mind about which side to castle on. Usually the queenside is safer, but sometimes the kingside is good if White gets rid of Black's key attacking pieces, notably the king's bishop, which is always enemy number one in the From. Here it's obviously premature to castle when no pieces have been exchanged and Black is ready to attack, as the following game shows: 13 0-0? ♘e5 14 ♕e3 ♘c4 15 ♕e2 ♖xh2! 16 ♔xh2 ♕h4+ 17 ♔g1 ♗xg3 18 ♖xf5 gxf5 19 ♕xc4 f4 20 ♗xf4 ♗xf4 21 ♕e2 ♕g3 22 ♔f1 ♖h8 23 ♘a3 ♗e3 24 ♕e1 ♕f4+ 25 ♔e2 ♖h2 26 ♔d3 ♖xg2 27 ♕xe3 ♖g3 and Black was winning in M.Aigner-S.Shivaji, San Francisco 2004.

b) 13 ♗f4?! allows a simple pinning combination in 13...♗xf4 14 gxf4 ♗xe4 15 ♕xe4 (15 ♗xe4 f5 16 ♘d2 fxe4 17 ♕e2 ♕h4+ with attack) 15...♕xe4+ 16 ♗xe4 ♖de8 17 ♘d2 f5 and Black equalizes.

c) 13 ♔d1 ♗e6 14 ♔c2 ♗e5 leaves Black exploiting White's exposed king and queen.

d) So what is best? The simple but very powerful developing move 13 ♗e3! is the right way to play, addressing matters on the e-file and preparing 14 ♘d2 with smooth development. Black has yet to demonstrate anything approaching equality here, despite trying four moves:

d1) 13...♖de8 (note that 13...♗xe4 is plain bad in view of 14 ♗xe4 ♖de8 15 ♘d2 f5 16 ♗xc6 ♕xe3+ 17 ♕xe3 ♖xe3+ 18 ♔f2 ♖d3 19 ♗xb7+ ♔xb7 20 ♔e2 and White easily wins the ending) 14 ♘d2 with a solid extra pawn. Black tried to mix it up with 14...♖xh2 in Hanegby-Corbat, for which see Game 36.

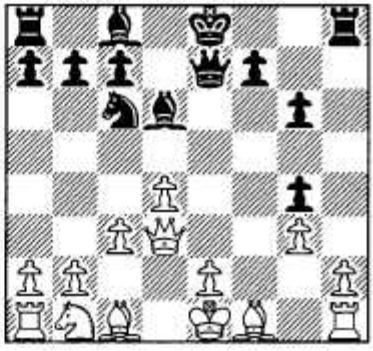
d2) 13...♖he8 14 ♘d2 ♗e6 15 e5 (good enough, but 15 ♕e2 wins a piece, e.g. 15...f6 16 e5 fxe5 17 d5 etc.) 15...♗d7 (or 15...♗f5 16 ♕e2 ♗xe5 17 ♗xc6 ♗xd4 18 cxd4 bxc6 19 ♔f2 and

Black doesn't have enough for the piece) 16 0-0-0 f6 17 ♕xg6 ♗xe5 (17...fxe5 18 ♗g5 ♕f8 19 ♖hf1 ♕h8 20 ♗xd8 and Black has nothing for the exchange) 18 dxe5 ♘xe5 19 ♕e4 ♗c6 20 ♕f5+ ♗d7 21 ♕f1 ♗a4 (21...♕h7 22 ♘e4) 22 ♘b3 ♕e6 23 ♗xb7+! ♔b8 24 ♕a6! and White forced the queens off and won easily in T.Taylor-B.Purcell, Los Angeles Masters (rapidplay) 2005.

d3) 13...♖xh2 14 ♖xh2 ♗xg3+ 15 ♔d1 (15 ♔f1 should also win, albeit in a messier fashion) 15...♗xh2 16 exf5! ♖e8 17 fxg6 (the point – White returns the piece to get a pawn to the seventh) 17...♕xe3 (17...fxg6 18 ♗d2 is an easy win as Black has no pawn mass on the kingside) 18 ♕xe3 ♖xe3 19 gxf7 ♗d6 20 ♘d2 ♗f8 21 ♗xc6 bxc6 22 ♔c2 ♖e2 23 ♖f1 and White should win with an extra pawn and the superior minor piece.

d4) 13...♗d7 (the best try) and now White must beware another one move trick, namely 14 ♘d2? ♖h2! which works once the bishop is no longer en prise. Just as bad is 14 e5? ♗xe5! 15 dxe5 ♘xe5 16 ♕e2 ♘d3+ 17 ♔f1 ♖he8 and Black has an overwhelming attack. Not so calamitous but also poor is 14 ♗f4, which is given in *ECO*. White should be trying to exchange knight for bishop, not bishop for bishop, as in the former case he retains good control over the dark squares. The other problem with this move is that it allows Black to open lines quickly while White is undeveloped. Black plays 14...♗xf4 15 gxf4 g5! (White can't stop the line opening, as 16 f5? fails to 16...♗xf5) 16 fxg5 ♕xg5 17 ♕d2 ♕a5 18 ♕f2 f5 19 ♘d2 (again, White can't play actively with an undeveloped position, 19 e5? allowing 19...♘e5! 20 dxe5 ♕xe5 with a winning attack for Black) 19...fxe4 20 ♗xe4 ♖de8 with good play for the pawn because White's king is still unsafe.

Instead White should play 14 ♗f2!, a recommendation of the Russian master Dmitrij Oleinikov. Black has tried 14...f6 15 ♘d2 ♖h5 16 0-0-0 ♘a5 (16...♖a5 17 a3) 17 d5 (I would prefer to give back a pawn to seize the initiative and open lines for the bishops, e.g. 17 e5! fxe5 18 ♘e4 exd4 19 ♕xd4 b6 20 ♘xd6+ cxd6 21 b4 ♘b7 22 ♖he1 with two bishops and an attack) 17...b6 and White prematurely took a draw in J.Wuttke-U.Baumgardt, Germany 2000, even though he is still better after 18 ♗d4. Alternatively, 14...f5 15 ♘d2 (not 15 e5 ♘xe5 16 dxe5 ♕xe5+) 15...fxe4 16 ♘xe4 ♗f5 (16...♖de8 17 0-0-0 ♗f5 18 ♘xd6+) 17 0-0-0 and Black can't use the pin, e.g. 17...♔b8 18 ♕e3 ♖de8 19 ♘xd6 and White is simply a pawn up.

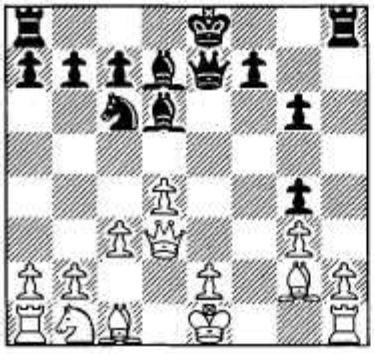


11 ♗g2!

White simply develops rather than lose a tempo with the weaker 11 e4 – consider Black's best try above, variation 'd4' where Black played the forcing

10...♗f5 11 e4 ♕e7 12 ♗g2 0-0-0 13 ♗e3 ♗d7. In many of the sub variations the black bishop's being en prise for a few moves proved a significant factor. In this case, with 11 e4, Black saves the tempo ...♗f5-d7, while White is not threatening the bishop in several key lines. In practical terms, this means White can't achieve his favourable development – take a look at what happens if he tries: 11 e4? ♗d7 12 ♗g2 0-0-0 13 ♗e3? is an attempt to adopt the same set-up seen in line 'd' in the previous note, but this was tactically justified by blocking the e-file and so threatening the bishop. Here there is no such attack, so the 'one move threat' policy comes into play... 13...♖xh2 (disaster!) 14 ♖xh2 ♗xg3+ 15 ♔e2 ♗xh2 16 ♘d2 ♗g3 17 ♖h1 f5 18 ♘f1 ♗h4 19 e5 g5 20 ♗f2 ♘xe5 21 dxe5 ♕xe5+ 22 ♕e3 ♕b5+ and White stared in horror at the ruin of his position and resigned in G.De Paula-A.Segal, Sao Paulo 1991. The tempo is crucial!

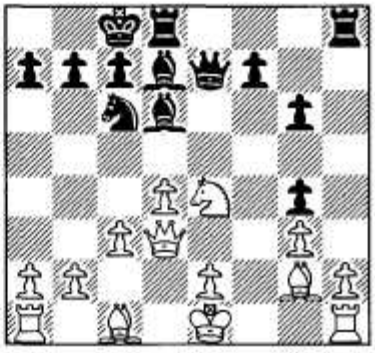
11...♗d7



12 ♘d2

And this is another good move. In Henry Bird style the knight has designs on Black's dangerous king's bishop, which is another reason to keep the e4-square open. 12 ♗f4 is again less successful after 12...♗xf4 13 gxf4 g5!, when 14 d5 ♘a5 15 ♕d4 0-0-0! 16 ♕a7 ♗b5 gives Black too much counterplay.

12...0-0-0 13 ♘e4!



As in Game 2 I take the first opportunity to eliminate the dangerous bishop. Becerra took a very long think here, and stopped looking happy. It is obvious that White stands better here, but how did that happen? What went wrong with the Grandmaster's preparation? Clearly I didn't do anything special (13 ♘e4 is my first active move, in fact), so what *did* White do? The answer is very simple: I avoided the tricks. On practically every turn from the third move onwards, Black has had some kind of threat, trap, or one move trick – this is the nature of the From, and of the Lasker Variation in particular. But if White keeps his head the solid centre and extra pawn present Black with an uphill battle.

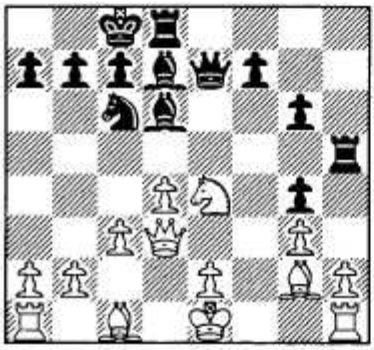
The aspiring Bird player should study the above analysis closely, not just for the exact moves, but the ideas behind Black's tricks – the mate theme on the

h4-e1 diagonal, the threatened ...♘xd4 and the many possible sacrifices on e5 or h2. When you have this sorted, then the Lasker Variation will not be a frightening monster, rather a limited system that runs out of gas pretty quickly!

13...f5

Because of the tournament situation Becerra plays to win, but this is objectively worse (although more complicated) than the alternative 13...♗f5, when White forces the exchange of queens: 14 ♗g5 (14 ♘xd6+ ♖xd6 gives Black development compensation for the pawn) 14...♗xe4 15 ♗xe7 ♗xd3 16 ♗xd8 ♖e8 17 0-0! ♗xe2 18 ♗f6 ♗xf1 19 ♖xf1 with the two bishops and the better ending. Black would have a tough fight to draw and no winning chances whatsoever.

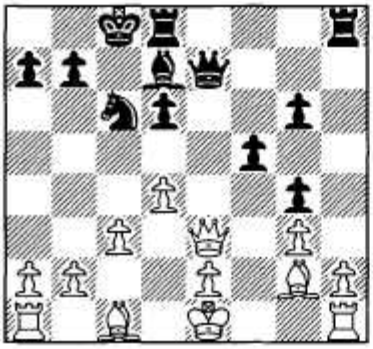
In Hanegby-Novoa, E-mail 2001, Black tried 13...♖h5 but White quickly found an interesting tactic.



There followed 14 ♘xd6+ cxd6 15 ♕e3 (another key square for the queen in this opening, White threatens to exchange ladies and also eyes a7) 15...♗e6 16 h3! (perhaps even more accurate is 16 h4, when Black must immediately take en passant, reaching the game position, or allow White to solidify his pawn structure and end Black's pressure on the h-file) 16...gxh3 17 ♗f3! (the basis of the combination is that the black rook has no safe square on the fifth rank, but if it leaves that line White plays the decisive 18 d5) 17...♖dh8 (this exchange sacrifice is insufficient, but after 17...♖a5 [17...♖f5 18 g4; 17...♖b5 18 a4] 18 b4! ♖a2 19 ♖a2 ♗a2 20 b5 ♕e3 21 ♗e3 ♘e7 22 ♖h3 Black once again has a painful ending to defend against White's powerful bishops). The game continued 18 ♗xh5 ♖xh5 19 ♖h2 d5 20 ♕f3 ♖f5 21 ♕d3 ♕f6 22 ♖h1 ♖h5 23 ♕f3 ♖f5 24 ♕e3 ♖h5 25 ♗d2 ♗f5 26 ♕e8+ ♔c7 27 ♗f4+ ♔b6 28 ♕e3 ♗e4 29 ♖h2 ♗g2 and a critical position was reached. White has played very well thus far and stands clearly better, but must devise a winning plan. Hanegby chooses complex play which wins even more material but ends up allowing a problem draw! He would have done better to follow Capablanca and return the exchange to win a pawn, thus emerging with a numerical superiority. To this end White should play 30 0-0-0 with the idea of ♖g1 and ♖g2, with an eventual win. Alas, in the game the win proved elusive, and I give the conclusion for the entertaining and instructive draw: 30 c4 dxc4 31 d5+ ♘d4 32 ♖d1 ♖xd5 33 ♕c3 ♘f3+ 34 exf3 ♕xc3+ 35 bxc3 ♖xd1+ 36 ♔xd1 ♗xf3+ 37 ♔d2 ♗g2 38 ♗e3+ ♔c7 39 g4 f5 40 gxf5 gxf5 41 ♗xa7 b6 42 ♔e3 ♔b7 43 ♗xb6 ♔xb6 44 ♔f4 ♔c5 45 ♔xf5 ♔d5 46 ♔f4 ♔c6 47 ♔g3 ♔d5 48 ♖xg2 hxg2 49 ♔xg2 ♔e4 50 a4 ♔d3 51 a5 ♔xc3 52 a6 ♔b2 53 a7 c3 54 a8♕ c2 (the magic bishop pawn draws!)

bishop pawn draws!) 55 ♕b7+ ♔a1 56 ♕a6+ ♔b1 57 ♕b5+ ♔a1 58 ♕a4+ ♔b1 59 ♕b3+ ½-½ as Black will play the famous stalemate trick 59...♔a1! etc.

14 ♘xd6+ cxd6 15 ♕e3!

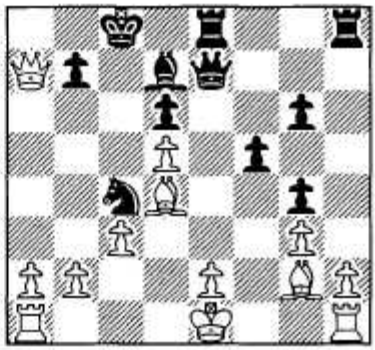


This is even stronger than in the Hanegby game, given above, as Black can't block on e6. He has only two choices: exchange queens a pawn down, or sacrifice a second pawn. Naturally he prefers the practical chances of the second variation but, objectively, White is winning now. How often does one obtain a winning position against a GM in fifteen moves? Not often with 'approved' opening moves like 1 d4 or 1 e4! But the audacious Bird, with its unexplored byways and sudden tactics (like this 15 ♕e3!), can throw the highest rated opponent off balance. One understands again why Bent Larsen could defeat world champions with the Bird – he was playing on his own turf, as I was here.

15...♕f7 16 d5 ♘e5

Not 16...♖de8 17 dxc6 ♖xe3 18 cxd7+ ♕xd7 19 ♗xe3 and the rook and bishops easily defeat the queen.

17 ♕xa7 ♖de8 18 ♗e3 ♘c4 19 ♗d4 ♕e7



This is forced because 19...♖h5 20 b3 ♘e5 21 ♗b6 spins a mating web.

20 e4?!

The text is fine, and – for what it is worth – the computer considers it the best move but, from a human standpoint, there is no reason to make things so complicated. I should have played the simple 20 0-0 (which is safe now as Black has no king's bishop), which would quickly end Black's counterplay, e.g. 20...♕h7 21 ♗xh8 ♖xh8 22 ♖f4! (the rook is very active on the fourth rank) 22...♗b5 (22...♕xh2+ 23 ♔f2 [intending ♖h1] 23...♖h3 24 ♕a8+ ♔c7 25 ♖c4+ and mates) 23 h4 gxh3 24 ♖h4 and wins. Alternatives are even worse for Black – 20...♔c7 21 ♗xh8 ♖xh8 22 ♕d4 ♘e5 23 ♖f2 ♕h7 24 ♗h1 and White consolidates with the extra material, 20...♕xe2 21 ♖f2 ♕e7 22 ♗xh8 and it's all over or 20...♖h5 21 b3 and White wins. The nice thing about these variations is that they're all short! I should have made life easy for myself!

20...♕g5 21 0-0?!

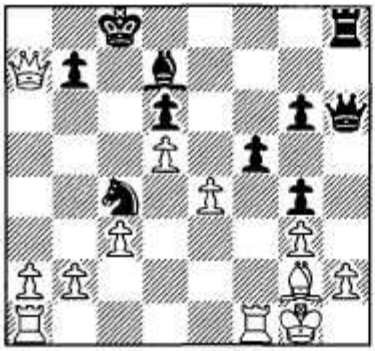
Now this is a real mistake, and a clean win is still available with the accurate 21

♖d1, and now:

a) 21...♖h7 22 b3.

b) 21...♖xe4+ 22 ♗xe4 ♖e8 23 0-0 ♖xe4 24 b3 ♖xd4 (24...♘e3 25 ♗b6 ♗b5 26 ♕a8+ ♔d7 27 ♕xb7+ ♔e8 28 ♗xe3 ♕xe3+ 29 ♖f2 ♗e2 30 ♖e1 ♕d3 31 ♕c6+ ♔e7 32 ♕c7+ ♔e8 33 ♕xd6 with a massive material plus) 25 ♖xd4 ♕c3+ 26 ♔h1 ♘e5 27 ♕a8+ ♔c7 28 ♕a5+ ♔c8 29 ♔g2 and two exchanges are good enough!

21...♕h6 22 ♗xh8 ♖xh8



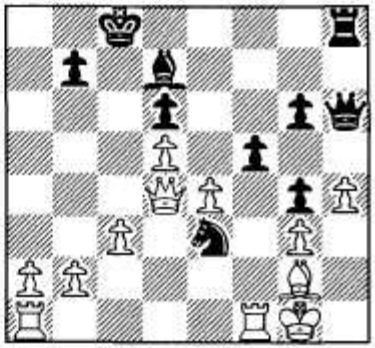
The big difference between this position and the analogous one that could have arisen after 20 0-0 is that now ♖f4 would *not* attack the black knight on c4, rendering that rook move erroneous: 23 ♖f4? ♕h2+ 24 ♔f2 ♖h3 with a powerful attack. Therefore it's best to directly block the h-file with 23 h4 gxh3 24 ♗f3 ♘d2 25 ♖f2 fxe4 26 ♗e2 ♕g5 27 ♔h2 ♕xd5 28 ♕a8+ ♔c7 29 ♕xh8 c3 30 ♕f8, when White maintains his material advantage.

23 ♕d4?!

White's third inaccurate move let's Black back into the game.

23...♘e3! 24 h4

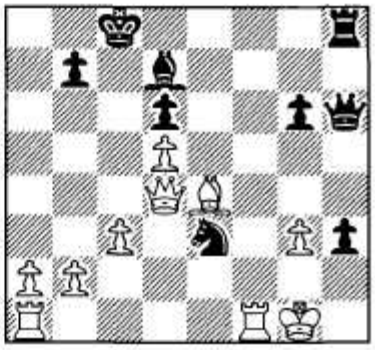
White has to shed material to protect his king; check out the ghastly 24 ♖f2?? ♕xh2 mate!



24...gxh3 25 ♗f3 fxe4?!

Black misses his chance, 25...f4!, destroying White's kingside pawn cover. After 26 gxf4 ♘xf1 27 ♖xf1 ♖f8 28 f5 gxf5 29 exf5 ♖xf5 30 ♔h2 Black has compensation for the pawn thanks to White's wide open kingside.

26 ♗xe4



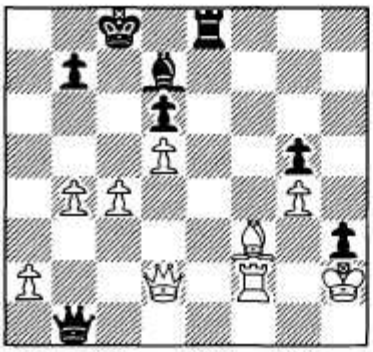
What a difference one pawn makes! Now White retains a friendly pawn to shield his king along with the h-pawn, and is once again in the driver's seat. This time around I avoid any accidents!

26...♘xf1 27 ♖xf1 ♖e8 28 ♔h2 ♕h5 29 ♗f3 ♕f5 30 c4 g5 31 g4 ♕c2+

32 ♖f2 ♕c1 33 ♕d2 ♕b1

In the event of the alternative 33...♕xc4 White forces the queen exchange and remains a pawn up in the ending after 34 ♕c2 ♕xc2 35 ♖xc2+ ♔d8 36 ♔xh3.

34 b4



Note that I don't want to capture Black's kingside pawns while the queens are still in play, as removing them from the board opens attacking lines for Black.

34...♕a1 35 ♕b2 ♕e1 36 c5

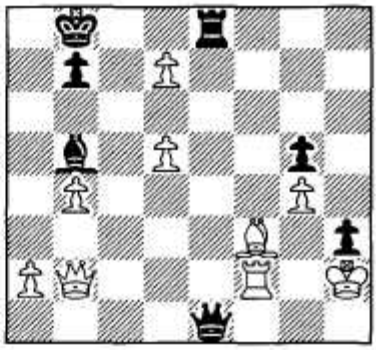
White finally activates the queenside pawn majority.

36...♗b5

36...♕e3 37 c6 ♕f4+ 38 ♔xh3 bxc6 39 dxc6 ♗c6 40 ♕g7 wins for White due to the mate threats, while after 36...dxc5 37 bxc5 the pawn roller is overwhelming.

37 cxd6 ♔b8 38 d7!

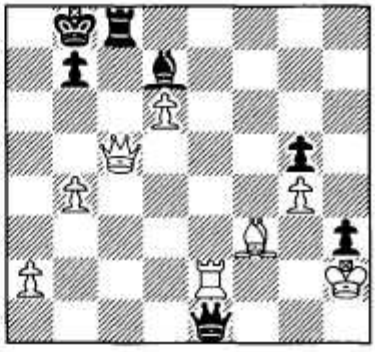
White continues to aim for simplification, e.g. 38...♗xd7 39 ♖e2 (forcing the rooks off) 39...♖xc2+ 40 ♕xc2 ♕xb4 41 ♕c5+ ♔a7 42 ♕xg5 ♕b2+ 43 ♔xh3 ♕xa2 44 ♕c7 and White will win with his two passed pawns and a focal point at b7.



38...♖d8 39 ♕d4

Although this doesn't let Black out, a short sharp win was possible. White could have finished stylishly with 39 a4! ♗xd7 (39...♗xa4 40 ♖e2 ♕f1 41 ♕c5+ ♔a7 42 d6! with the threat to win the rook with check) 40 ♖e2 ♕f1 41 ♕e5+ ♔a7 42 d6! etc.

39...♗xd7 40 d6 ♖f8 41 ♕c5 ♖c8 42 ♖e2!



42...♕xe2+?!

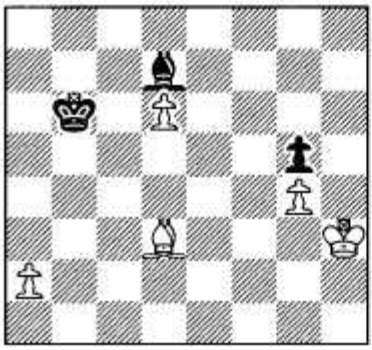
The coming bishop ending is a clear win for White. Black could have continued to resist a pawn down with 42...♕f1 43 ♕f2 ♕d1, although White should win eventually after 44 ♖d2 ♕c1 45 ♕d4.

43 ♗xe2 ♖xc5 44 bxc5 b6 45 cxb6

♔b7 46 ♔xh3 ♔xb6

Not 46...♔c6 47 ♗b5+!, and White gets a new queen.

47 ♗d3!



This was probably overlooked by Black when he played his 42nd move. White keeps the d-pawn, and the rest is easy.

47...♗e6 48 a3 ♔c6 49 ♗f5 1-0

The ending variations are clear: 49...♗b3 (49...♗xf5 50 gxf5 ♔xd6 51 ♔g4 is routine) 50 d7 ♔c7 51 ♔g3 ♗d1 52 ♔f2 ♗a4 53 ♔e3 ♔d8 54 ♔e4 ♗b3 55 ♔e5 ♔e7 56 d8♕+! ♔xd8 57 ♔f6 (Black can't cope with two such far separated pawns, and the rook's pawn is the right one) 57...♔e8 (or 57...♔c7 58 ♔xg5 ♔b6 59 ♔f6 ♔a5 60 g5 ♔a4 61 g6 ♔xa3 62 g7 ♗g8 63 ♗e6 ♗h7 64 ♔g5 ♔b4 65 ♔h6) 58 ♔xg5 ♔e7 59 ♔h6 ♔d6 60 g5 ♔e5 61 ♗d7 ♔d6 62 ♗b5 ♔e7 63 a4 ♔f8 64 g6 ♗d5 65 g7+ ♔e7 66 a5 ♔d6 67 a6 ♔c7 68 ♔g6 ♔b6 69 ♔f6 ♔a7 (69...♔xb5 70 a7 ♔b6 71 a8♕) 70 ♗e8 ♗g8 71 ♗f7 ♗h7 72 ♔g5 ♔xa6 73 ♔h6 and White wins.

Despite White's spot of shakiness (moves 20-23), this game is very important theoretically, as Black, a strong GM and seemingly well prepared for the opening, was objectively lost by the 15th move!

Is the Lasker Variation dead? As one sees from the notes, the best I have been able to find for Black are an assortment of poor endings where he *might* make a draw. This is hardly the active play sought by the typical From gambiteer!

The next three games supply three more stakes for the heart of the Lasker Variation!

Game 36

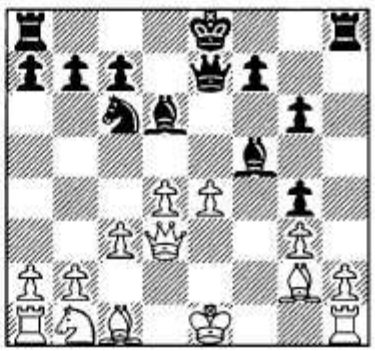
Hanegby-Corbat

Email 2001

1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 ♗xd6 4 ♘f3 g5 5 g3 g4 6 ♘h4 ♘e7 7 d4 ♘g6 8 ♘xg6 hxg6 9 ♕d3 ♘c6 10 c3 ♕e7

If Black wants his bishop on f5, he should play it now. Delaying one move gives White an additional opportunity.

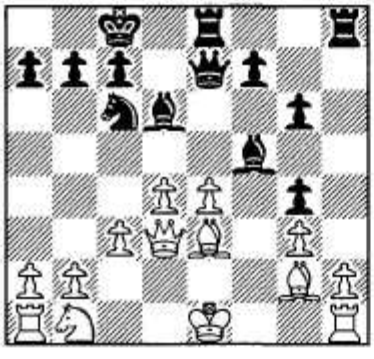
11 ♗g2 ♗f5 12 e4



This main line (which is normally reached by 10...♗f5 11 e4 ♕e7 12 ♗g2 with the same position) seems very good for White, but in the game order White

had another chance for advantage. I would say it's a bad sign in an opening when one side has a choice of how to secure an advantage while the other is walking a tightrope just to stay in the game. This alternative is 12 ♕e3, when Black must exchange queens a pawn down as 12...♗e6 fails to 13 d5. After 12...♕xe3 13 ♗xe3 White should be able to gradually make the extra pawn tell, and Black has no tricks, e.g. 13...♖xh2?? 14 ♗xc6+ bxc6 15 ♖xh2 ♗xg3+ 16 ♖f2 ♖b8 17 b3 and Black resigned in De Ruiter-De Laat, correspondence 1993.

12...0-0-0 13 ♗e3 ♖de8

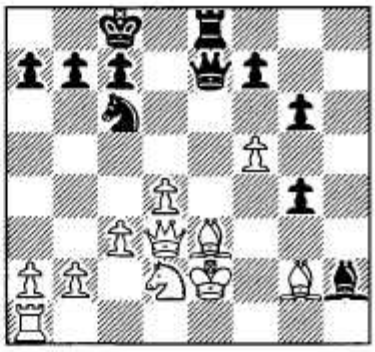


14 ♘d2 ♖xh2

If Black plays quietly with 14...♗d7, then after 15 0-0-0 (15 e5? ♗xe5 16 dxe5 ♘xe5 17 ♕e2 ♗f5 with attack) 15...f6 16 e5 fxe5 (now that White has castled, 16...♗xe5 fails to 17 dxe5 ♘xe5 18 ♕c2 ♗f5 19 ♗e4) 17 d5 ♘d8 18 ♕xg6 and White keeps the gambit pawn, when no adequate compensation can be seen.

15 ♖xh2 ♗xg3+ 16 ♔e2 ♗xh2 17 exf5

Note the importance of this capture. White emerges a piece up, and Black is unable to demonstrate compensation.



17...♗f4 18 ♘f1

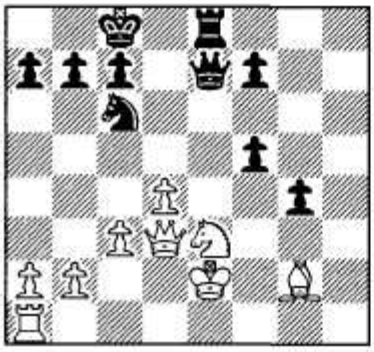
This is stronger than 18 ♘c4, which is recommended by some sources but is absurdly complicated – there's no reason to give Black practical chances in this way, e.g. 18...b5 19 fxg6 fxg6 20 ♕xg6 ♗xe3 21 ♕xg4+ ♔b8 22 ♗xc6 ♗xd4+ when White can even lose after 23 ♔d1? ♕e1+ 24 ♔c2 ♖e2+ 25 ♔b3 ♖xb2+! 26 ♔xb2 ♕xc3+ 27 ♔b1 ♕xa1+ 28 ♔c2 ♕xa2+ with a decisive material lead for Black! Yes, maybe White can win with 23 ♔d2, but there's no logical chess reason to go into that mess! Hanegby's simple, safe move maintains the extra piece without any drama.

18...♗xe3

Another possibility is 18...♕g5 19 fxg6 f5 20 ♔d2 ♗xe3+ 21 ♘xe3 ♔b8 22 ♗xc6 bxc6, when White went off the rails and allowed a draw in M.Leonardon-E.Gaudineau, Besancon 1999 after 23 ♖e1 f4 24 ♘xg4 ♖xe1 25 ♔xe1 ♕xg4 26 ♔f2 (26 ♕e4 still wins but it's tougher) 26...♕h4+ 27 ♔g2 ½-½ . Instead of this disaster White had a clean win with 23 g7! (making this pawn a threat – 23...♕xg7 24 ♘xf5 and there is no compensation for the piece) 23...f4

24 ♘f5 g3 (24...f3+ 25 ♔c2 and wins as Black's pawns are tactically blockaded) 25 ♔c2 g2 26 ♖g1 ♕g4 27 ♔b3 f3 28 ♘h4! ♕xh4 (28...f2 29 ♖g2) 29 ♕xf3 ♔b7 30 ♖xg2 ♕h7 31 ♕f7 etc.

19 ♘xe3 gxf5



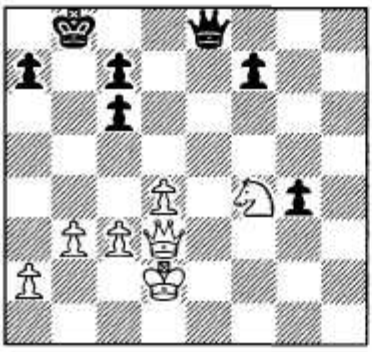
20 ♔d2

This cautious move, lifting the pin, is fine, but even 20 ♕xf5+ ♔b8 21 ♕f4 wins.

20...♔b8 21 ♗xc6 bxc6 22 ♖e1 ♕e6 23 b3

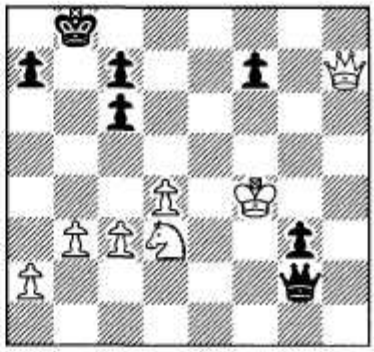
Now it is a matter of technique.

23...f4 24 ♘g2 ♕d7 25 ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 26 ♘xf4



26...♕h8 27 ♕f5 ♕h4 28 ♘d3 ♕h2+ 29 ♔e3 ♕g3+ 30 ♔e4 ♕g2+ 31 ♔f4 g3 32 ♕h7

White intends to check on g8.



32...♕d2+

32...♔b7 33 ♘c5+ ♔b6 34 ♕d3 threatening the g-pawn (as well as mate).

33 ♔xg3

I would say it's time to resign.

33...♕xc3 34 ♕e4 a5 35 ♔f3 f5 36 ♕e8+ ♔a7 37 ♕e3 ♕a1 38 ♕e5 ♔b6 39 ♕c5+ ♔b7 40 ♕xa5 ♕d1+ 41 ♔e3 ♕g1+ 42 ♔d2 ♕xd4 43 ♕xf5 ♕a1 44 a4 ♕a2+ 45 ♔c3 ♕a1+ 46 ♔c4 ♕g1 47 ♘c5+ ♔a7 48 ♕e5 ♕c1+ 49 ♔b4 ♕d2+ 50 ♕c3 ♕d8 51 ♕d3 ♕b8+ 52 ♔a3 ♕c8 53 a5 1-0

Black finally resigns, a possible finish being 53...♔b8 54 ♕a6 ♕xa6 55 ♘xa6+ ♔b7 56 ♘c5+ ♔a7 57 b4 ♔b8 58 ♔b3 ♔a7 59 ♔c4 ♔b8 60 ♔d4 ♔a7 61 ♔c5 ♔b8 62 ♔e6 ♔c8 63 a6 ♔b8 64 ♔d7 ♔a7 65 ♔xc6 ♔b8 66 b5 ♔a7 67 ♔xc7 ♔a8 68 a7 ♔xa7 69 b6+ and mates.

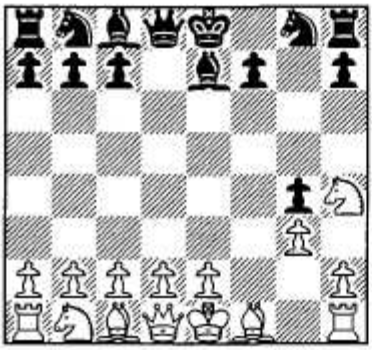
Game 37

D.Reinderman-F.Erwich

Hoogeveen 1998

1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 ♗xd6 4

♘f3 g5 5 g3 g4 6 ♘h4 ♗e7



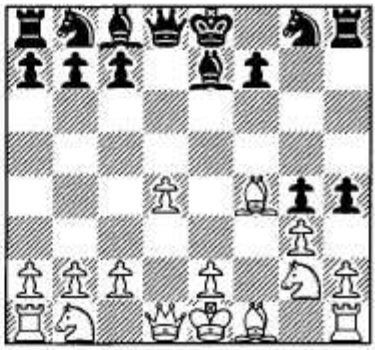
This is even more direct than Spielmann's 6...♘e7, but I don't believe it justifies gambiting a centre pawn. Black tries to attack immediately on the h-file, but White can defend while developing.

7 ♘g2 h5

The consistent follow-up to attacking the knight. 7...♘c6 has been tried, e.g. 8 c3 h5 9 ♘f4 h4 10 ♗g2 ♘h6 (10...h3 11 ♗xc6+ bxc6 12 e4 ♘f6 13 d3 and Black has nothing for the pawn) 11 d4 f5 (this allows a sudden raid, but on other moves White pushes the e-pawn) 12 ♘g6 ♖h7 13 ♕b3 ♕d6 14 ♘xe7 ♖xe7 15 ♗xh6 ♕xh6 16 ♕g8+ ♔d7 17 ♘d2 h3 18 ♗xc6+ ♕xc6 19 0-0-0 ♕h6 20 ♖hf1 ♖e8 21 ♕d5+ ♔e7 22 e4 and White broke through in the centre with his extra pawn intact in J.Pinazo Donoso-J.Garcia Gil, Santa Coloma 1997. The game ended 22...c6 23 ♕c5+ ♔d8 24 exf5 b6 25 ♕b4 ♖f8 26 ♖de1 ♔c7 27 ♕e7+ ♗d7 28 ♖e6 1-0. Note that White, and not the From's Gambit player, did all the attacking.

8 d4 h4 9 ♗f4

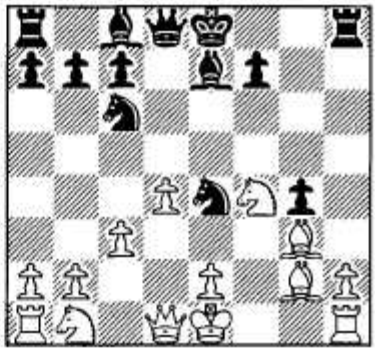
Everything is held. White has the greater influence in the centre and even a lead in development.



9...hxg3 10 ♗xg3 ♘f6 11 ♘f4 ♘c6

Black's only chance is to break up White's centre, even if he has to exchange queens in the process. While this surely was not the gambiteer's intention, he must accept that all he can hope for now is a draw. Therefore after 11...c5 12 dxc5 ♕xd1+ 13 ♔xd1 ♘c6 14 ♗g2 ♗xc5 15 ♘d2 ♗d7 16 ♘d3 ♗e7 17 ♖f1 Black does not have full compensation for the pawn but can still strive for a split point.

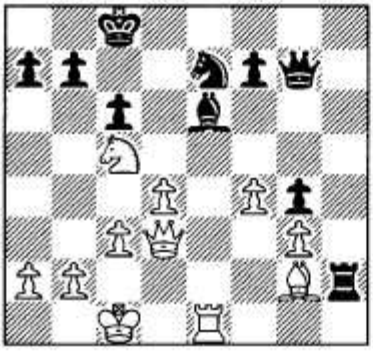
12 c3 ♘e4 13 ♗g2



White has coolly met Black's succession of one move threats and, as I said before, this kind of play has limited effi-

cacy from Black's point of view. The tricks are over, and Black has nothing for the pawn.

13...♘xg3 14 hxg3 ♖xh1+ 15 ♗xh1 ♕d6 16 ♕d3 ♕h6 17 ♗g2 ♗g5 18 e3 ♘e7 19 ♘d2 c6 20 0-0-0 ♗xf4 21 exf4 ♗e6 22 ♖h1 ♕g7 23 ♘e4 0-0-0 24 ♘c5 ♖h8 25 ♖e1 ♖h2



26 ♖e2

This is not bad, but White should put Black away immediately with the following sharp tactic, based on clearing either b5 or f5 for the queen: 26 d5! and now:

a) 26...♖xg2 27 dxe6 with a winning attack.

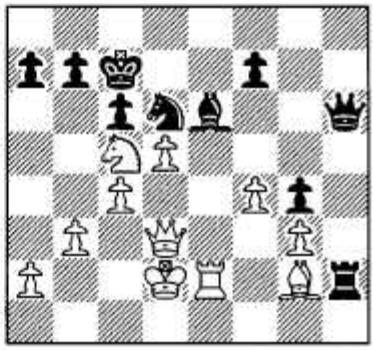
b) 26...cxd5 27 ♕b5 ♖g2 28 ♕b7+ ♔d8 29 ♖e6 with forced mate.

c) 26...♘xd5 27 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 28 ♖e8+ ♔c7 29 ♖e7+ ♔d8 30 ♘e6+ and the queen falls.

d) 26...♗xd5 27 ♖xe7 ♖xg2 28 ♕f5+ ♗e6 29 ♘xe6 etc.

This would have been drastic punishment indeed for Black's overly crude attack, but GM Reinderman's solid play also secures the full point.

26...♕h6 27 ♔d2 ♘f5 28 b3 ♘d6 29 ♘e4 ♘f5 30 ♘c5 ♘d6 31 c4 ♔c7 32 d5



32...♗f5 33 ♕e3 ♕f6?!

33....cxd5 prolongs the game with.

34 ♕e5 ♕xe5 35 fxe5 ♘c8 36 d6+ ♔b6 1-0

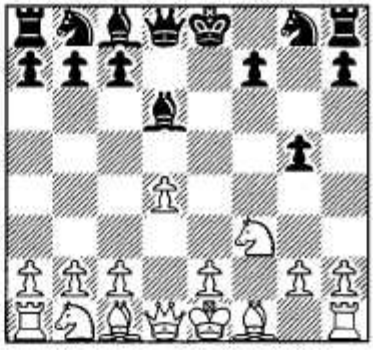
(Black doesn't wait for 37 d7). Note the power of White's centre pawns in the final position – and recall Black sacrificed both of his centre pawns in the opening. This line will certainly not save the Lasker variation!

Game 38

A.Berescu-M.Zerdo

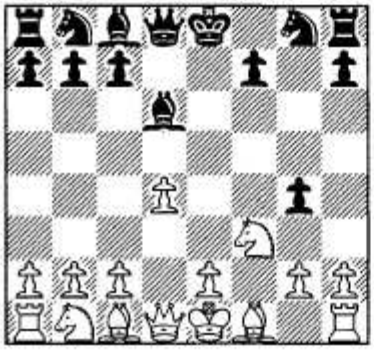
World Under-18 Ch., Oropesa del Mar 1998

1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 ♗xd6 4 ♘f3 g5 5 d4



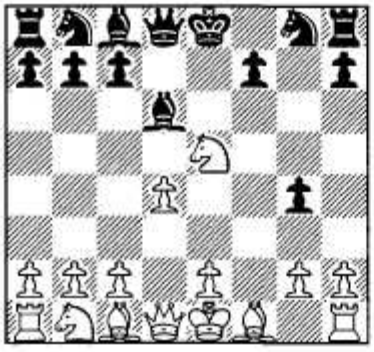
This is how Bird met Lasker's attack in their original game in 1892!

5... g4



6 ♘e5

The only alternative is 6 ♘g5?, which used to be thought of as a sacrifice but is now seen clearly as a blunder – see Game 39 for the refutation. With 6 ♘e5 White avoids the sharp tactics of Games 35-37 and plays for a slight edge while keeping the draw in hand. Note that Black has no choice here – he must give up his bishop and trade queens as otherwise White is just better with a strong central knight and an extra pawn.



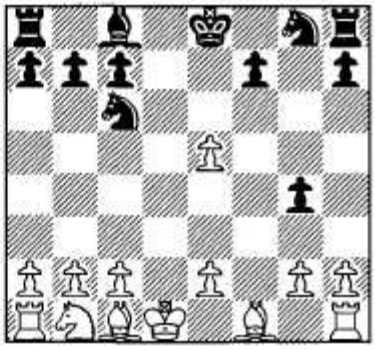
6. ...♗xe5

Yes, Black could win the pawn back with 6...♕h4+? 7 g3 ♕h5 8 ♗g2 ♗xe5 9 dxe5 ♕xe5 10 ♘c3 but after all that lost time he will soon be put to death by White's bishops.

7 dxe5 ♕xd1+

At least this prevents White from castling and is therefore preferable to 7...♕e7 8 ♘c3 ♕xe5 9 ♕d5 with a clear lead for White.

8 ♔xd1 ♘c6

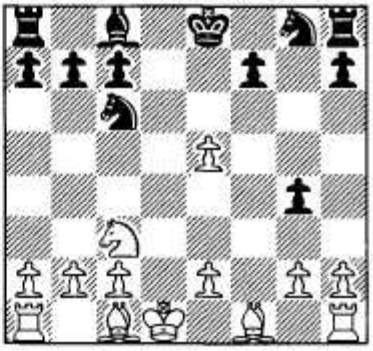


9 ♘c3!

This is Berescu's improvement, but before I discuss his ideas, let's take a look at the original Bird-Lasker game, which took a different path here: 9 ♗f4 ♗e6 10 e3 ♘ge7 11 ♗b5 (White is using his bishops to try to maintain his extra pawn) 11...0-0-0+ 12 ♔c1 ♗d5 (with strong pressure against White's kingside) 13 ♖g1 a6 14 ♗e2 ♗e6 15 ♘c3 h6 16 ♗d3?! (White should return the extra pawn to complete development, 16 b3 ♘g6 17 ♔b2 ♘cxe5 18 ♖ad1 producing a level game) 16...♘g6 17 ♗xg6 fxg6 18 ♖d1 ♖de8 19 e4 g5 20 ♗g3 ♖hf8 21 b3 h5 22 ♖d2 h4 23 ♗f2 ♘xe5 24 ♗e3 h3 25 ♗xg5 (25 ♔b2 g3 26 hxg3 h2) 25...g3!! (Lasker at his best, and fabulous indeed!) 26 hxg3 ♖f1+ 27 ♔b2 ♖xa1 28

♔xa1 h2 29 ♖d1 ♘g4 30 ♖h1 ♗f7 31 ♔b2 c6 32 ♔c1 ♗g6 33 ♔d2 ♖xe4!! (now if I could play the ending like this...) 34 ♘d1 ♖d4+ 35 ♔e2 ♖xd1 36 ♖xd1 ♗e4 37 ♖d8+ ♔c7 38 ♖d1 ♗xg2 39 ♗d8+ ♔c8 40 ♗b6 ♗d5 0-1, H.Bird-E.Lasker, Newcastle upon Tyne 1892. This is a splendid example of Lasker's genius in the ending, but what does it say about the opening? Well, not too much, since even surprised by Lasker's new line, and not playing the best, Bird could still have kept the game level as late as the 16th move. There is always a tendency in the chess world to annotate famous games like this according to result, to say '6 ♘e5 must be bad – remember how Lasker crushed Bird in that line?' etc. But that kind of simplistic thinking doesn't take into account any number of other significant factors, such as Bird being surprised by an opening novelty or that Lasker was a far superior ending player and so on. One has to look at the position objectively, and ask if Black was actually better out of the opening. It took a hundred years for someone to really take a look at this position, but young Berescu saw the truth of the position. Yes, White has an extra pawn, but one should not, like Bird, try to cling to it. More important is the fact that White has the bishop pair, so he should simply develop calmly and aim for a long-term advantage. Meanwhile, Black must lose time winning back the pawn (but if he waits too long, as in this game, he might not succeed at all).

As far as I can see the objective verdict on this ending is a slight plus for White. Psychologically, however, this might mean an even bigger plus over the board. Let's say Black comes to play with the From's Gambit in mind – he is ready to sacrifice a pawn and attack ferociously. Then a few moves later he finds himself a pawn down in the ending, struggling for a draw. This is not much fun.



9...♗e6

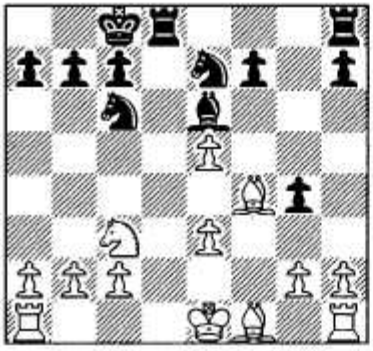
The pawn is not so easy to win back, for example after 9...♘xe5?! 10 ♗f4 f6 11 ♘d5 ♔d8 12 ♘xf6 ♘g6 13 ♘d5 White has traded his weak e-pawn for Black's f-pawn, adding value to the material lead.

10 ♗f4 0-0-0+

Another Berescu game continued 10...♘ge7 11 e3 ♘g6 12 ♗g5 ♘gxe5 and Black restored the points score but White had a slight edge in the shape of the bishop pair in A.Berescu-V.Tomescu, Sovata 1998. Both sides have pawn weaknesses, but the g-pawn sticking out in the middle of nowhere probably hurts Black a little more than the isolated e-pawn hinders White. There followed 13 ♘e4 h6 14 ♗f6 0-0 15 h3 (White uses Black's g-pawn to pry open a file) 15...♗f5 16 ♘g3 ♗e6 17

♗e2 gxh3 18 gxh3 ♘d7 19 ♗c3 f6 20 ♘h5 ♔f7 21 ♔d2 ♘ce5 22 ♖af1 ♔e7 23 b3 ♖f7 24 h4 ♖g8 25 ♖hg1 ♖ff8 26 ♖xg8 ♗xg8 27 ♖g1 ♗f7 28 ♘g7 ♗g6 29 ♔c1 ♔f7 30 ♘h5 ♖g8 31 ♘f4 ♗h7 32 ♗h5+ ♘g6?! (better is 32...♔e7 with only a slight edge for White) 33 ♘d5 c6 34 ♘xf6! ♘xf6 35 ♖f1 ♔e7 36 ♖xf6 ♘xh4 37 ♖xh6 ♗g6 38 ♗xg6 ♘xg6 39 ♖h7+ ♔e6 40 ♖xb7 ♘h4 41 ♖xa7 ♘f5 42 e4 1-0.

11 ♔e1 ♘ge7 12 e3



12...a6?!

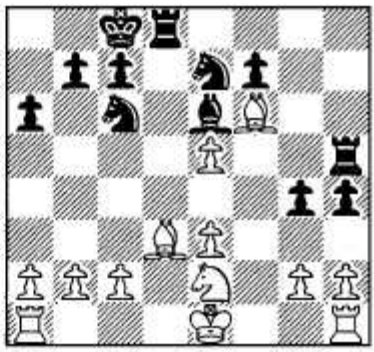
Black is being very casual about getting his pawn back, and if he waits too long he might regret it... 12...♘g6 improves, e.g. 13 ♗g5 ♖df8 14 ♗f6 ♖hg8 15 ♗e2 (15 ♗d3 ♘cxe5 16 ♗xe5 ♘xe5 17 ♗xh7 ♖h8 18 ♗d3 ♖d8 19 ♔e2 ♖h5 and Black might hold) 15...♘gxe5 16 ♖f1 with the typical edge for White that is characteristic of this variation.

13 ♗d3 h5?!

Black doesn't have time for this! Why move both wing pawns for no reason?

Still to be preferred is 13...♘g6, although Black is even further from equalizing now, e.g. 14 ♗g5 ♖de8 15 ♗f6 ♖hg8 16 ♘e4 h5 (16...♘gxe5? 17 ♗xe5 ♘xe5 18 ♘f6 and White wins the exchange) 17 ♘c5 ♘cxe5 (after 17...♗d5 18 ♗f5+ ♔b8 19 ♔f2 ♘cxe5 20 ♖ad1 the bishop pair is significant) 18 ♗e4 c6 19 ♘xe6 fxe6 20 ♖f1 and White's bishops ensure an enduring advantage.

14 ♗g5 h4 15 ♗f6 ♖h5 16 ♘e2!

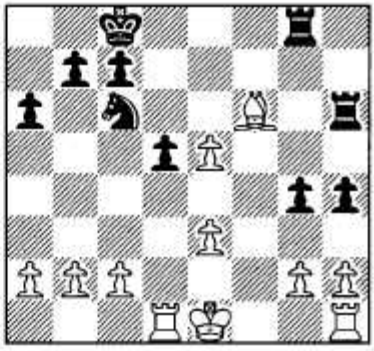


White has the remaining bishop in his sights.

16...♖g8 17 ♘f4 ♖h6 18 ♘xe6 fxe6 19 ♗c4

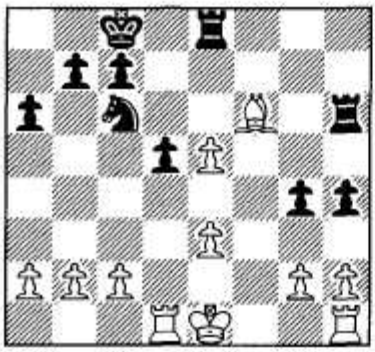
So much for getting the pawn back! In fact White wins a second pawn. The bishops are too strong, and Black's drawing chances have vanished.

19...♘d5 20 ♗xd5 exd5 21 ♖d1



21...♖e8

Or 21...♔d7 22 ♖xd5+ ♔e6 23 ♖c5 and the ending presents no problems.



22 ♖xd5 ♘b4 23 ♖c5 ♖h5 24 ♖f1 h3 25 g3 ♖e6 26 ♖c4 ♘d5 27 ♔d2 ♖b6 28 ♖xg4 ♖xb2?

A blunder, but given the three pawn deficit there was nothing to save Black.

29 ♖g8+ ♔d7 30 e6+ 1-0

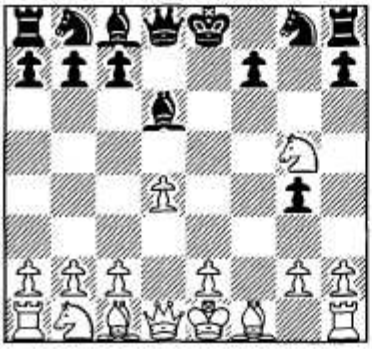
The long range piece – a legacy of the opening – supplies the coup de grace.

Game 39

D.Galbavy-V.Priehoda

Kubin 1978

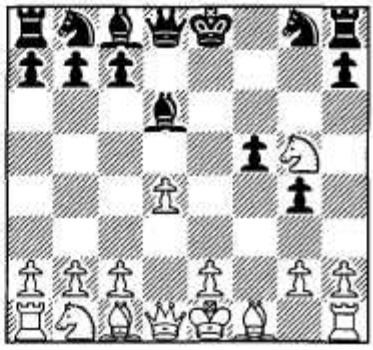
1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 ♗xd6 4 ♘f3 g5 5 d4 g4 6 ♘g5?



This move, with which Pirc once won a famous victory, was for many years considered to be a sound sacrifice. However, modern researchers have found the precise sequence to refute it.

6...f5

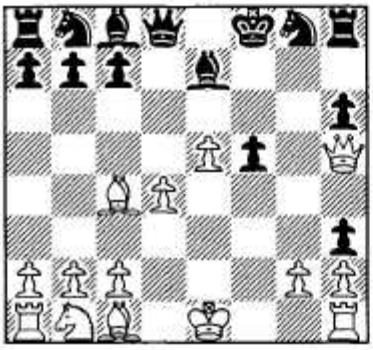
This thrust is the only good move. Black traps White's knight, thus putting the onus on White to attempt a justification of choosing g5 for his knight. Much weaker is 6...♘c6 7 ♘e4 when – as usual in the From – eliminating the enemy king's bishop helps White. Often White can return a pawn for a positional advantage, which is the case here, e.g. 7...♘xd4 8 ♘xd6+ ♕xd6 9 e3 with the typical lead afforded White by the bishop pair. Instead Taylor-Fink, Maryland 1975 continued 7...♗e7 8 e3 f5 9 ♘g3 and Black didn't have enough for the pawn.



7 e4

White can bail out with 7 d5 h6 8 ♕d4 (8 ♘e6 ♗xe6 9 dxe6 ♕h4+ is much better for Black) 8...♕f6 9 ♕xf6 ♘xf6 10 ♘e6 ♘xd5, when Black recovers his pawn with a substantial endgame advantage.

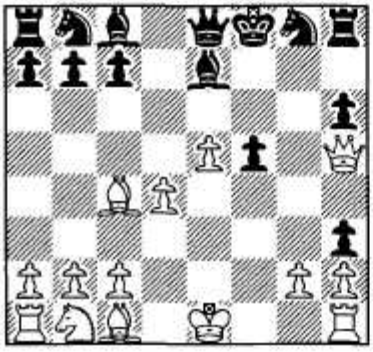
7...h6 8 e5 ♗e7 9 ♘h3 gxh3 10 ♕h5+ ♔f8 11 ♗c4



Here we have the basic position of the gambit. White has only one pawn for the piece, but he is threatening mate.

11... ♖h7

Defending this kind of situation can be tricky, and the text is correct, rather than 11...♕e8

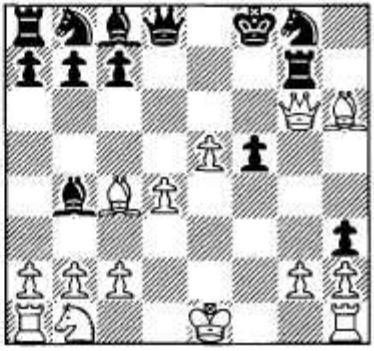


12 ♕xh3 (note that by moving his queen Black lost contact with d4, permitting White to safely make this capture, which provides two pawns for the piece and positional compensation thanks to the good centre) 12...♕g6 13 0-0 ♔g7 14 ♘c3 ♗g5 15 ♘e2 ♘e7 16 ♘f4 ♗xf4 17 ♗xf4 ♗e6 18 ♖f3!, when V.Pirc-J.Aitken, Munich 1954 continued 18...♗xc4 19 ♖g3 ♘bc6 20 c3 ♖ag8 21 ♖xg6+ ♘xg6 22 ♗d2 ♖f8 23 b3 ♗e6 24 ♖e1 ♖d8 25 ♗c1 a5 26 ♕g3 ♖df8 27 ♗b2 f4 28 ♕f2 b5 29 d5 ♗xd5 30 e6 ♔h7 31 c4 ♗xg2 32 ♔xg2 ♖hg8 33 ♔h1 f3 34 cxb5 ♘ce7 35 ♖f1 ♖f4 36 ♕c2 ♖gf8 37 ♕c3 ♖g8 38 ♖xf3 ♘d5 39 ♖xf4 ♘gxf4 40 ♕c2+ ♘g6 41 h4 ♖f8 42 h5 ♖f1+ 43 ♔h2 1-0. A stylish win, to be sure, but not exactly forced!

12 ♕g6

Unfortunately for White this looks logical but loses. Relatively best is 12 c3 ♗g5 13 ♘d2 (13 ♗d2 ♗d2+ 14 ♘d2 hxg2 15 ♖g1 ♕g5, with a big advantage to Black, was the computer versus computer battle, Scrappy-Insight, ICC 2001) 14...hxg2 14 ♖g1 ♗h4+ 15 ♔d1 ♕g5 and White didn't have enough for the piece in J.Lammi-J.Norri, Helsinki 1997.

12...♖g7 13 ♗xh6 ♗b4+!



This check is the refutation, after which every legal move loses for White:

a) 14 ♘c3 ♕h4+ and Black wins a second piece.

b) 14 ♔d1 ♘h6 15 ♕h6 ♕d4+ 16 ♗d3 hxg2 etc.

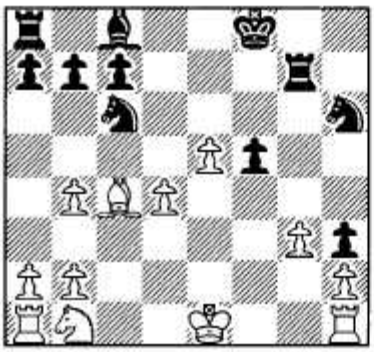
c) 14 ♔f2 ♕d4+ 15 ♔e2 ♕c4+, or 15 ♔g3 ♘h6..

d) 14 ♔f1 ♘h6 15 ♕h6 hxg2+ 16

♔e2! ♕g5! and White's tricks are over. Black has an extra piece, *and* a dangerous passed pawn.

White's next, then, is the last hope ...

14 c3 ♕h4+ 15 g3 ♕xh6 16 ♕xh6 ♘xh6 17 cxb4 ♘c6



18 ♘c3 ♘g4 19 b5 ♘xd4

In this position White has nothing for the piece.

20 0-0-0 c5 21 bxc6 ♘xc6 22 ♗b5 ♘f2 23 ♗xc6 bxc6 24 ♖hf1 ♘xd1

25 ♘xd1

Matters have grown even worse, and the extra rook decided in Black's favour on the 46th move...**0-1**

Summary

White can meet the Lasker Variation with Larsen's recommendation, 5 g3, and the subsequent sharp play seems to favour White as long as the first player is alert to Black's tricks (see Games 35-37). Berescu (Game 38) successfully revived Bird's original 5 d4, 6 ♘e5 idea and has won a couple of impressive games. At the moment this also looks like an uphill struggle for Black.

Finally, the old 6 ♘g5 sacrificial line (Game 39) can be considered refuted – but White has absolutely no reason to go near this line when he has such good alternatives. In general, the Lasker Variation is undergoing a crisis, and it's not clear if it can be revived.

CHAPTER EIGHT

From's Gambit, Mestel Variation

I call this line the Mestel Variation after the only GM brave enough to play Black's side of it in thirty years! The 'Full Mestel' occurs after 1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 ♗xd6 4 ♘f3 ♘f6 (I cover 4...♘c6 in Game 43) 5 d4 ♘g4 (for the quieter 5...0-0 see Game 42). The position after 5...♘g4 is one of the most complex around, and I have been looking at it sporadically for thirty years, without coming to any concrete conclusions. Even Fritz 8 is unable to cut through the tactical madness of the main lines! Despite GM Michael Adams' fate in 2005, I am so curious that I hereby challenge Hydra to a four game match, two with White, two with Black, playing each side of the critical positions that occur after 16 ♕xb7 and 16 ♗xc6+ (Games 40 and 41 respectively). Just maybe we could come to the truth of the position, or maybe not! Is the truth, in fact, knowable? Can a more powerful computer show us? Or do we really want to know? All I can say is that the complications are simply extraordinary, and quite beautiful in a mad sort of way.

Another curious fact is that two games I played over a span of a few months in late 1977 and early 1978 are still the 'cutting edge' of theory (because no one dares to follow!). In 1977 I found myself on Black's side of a From, facing a huge army of white pawns with only my heavy pieces and a knight that had somehow wandered to h2! I succeeded in winning the game, but my gut feeling was I had been lost somewhere in the complications – I found what I thought was the 'winning improvement' for White, and played it against GM Mestel a few months later. However, Mestel was not as impressed as I thought he should be, and he managed to find extraordinarily imaginative counterplay and finally won, despite being down vast amounts of material for most of the game! These two games (Game 41 and Game 40 – I present them in reverse chronological order to let the GM come first!) are so strange that I have more than once, while analyzing, had the

computer switch from 'winning for White' to 'winning for Black' on the same move! So what are we humans to do?

First, I should note that both these critical games were won by Black. Black is basically the attacker here, as the gambiteer should be. Although the second player is down a lot of material in both lines, it is often easier to attack than defend. So there is a practical element that favours Black. However, if my 'gut feeling' means anything, I still believe that, ultimately, the position favours White, and I have offered various improvements for White along the way.

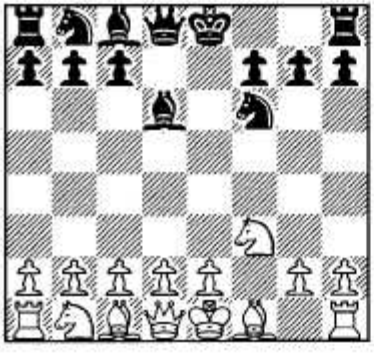
Finally, one should note that for all the ultra violence of this variation, White can force a draw on the 15th move, although this would hardly be in the spirit of the position.

Game 40

T.Taylor-A.Mestel

Lone Pine 1978

1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 ♗xd6 4 ♘f3 ♘f6



For 4...♘c6 see Game 43. It is important to recognize now (after 4...♘f6) that Black has an immediate threat, namely 5...♘g4 followed by a capture on h2, and mate on g3 or h4.

5 d4

In my opinion White has only one good move here, and that is the text, but there are other tries:

a) 5 ♘c3 ♘g4 6 ♘e4 covers g3 but it's not enough, as Black anyway has 6...♘xh2!, e.g. 7 ♘xh2 ♕h4+ 8 ♘f2 ♗g3, threatening mate and at least recovering the piece, 7 ♖xh2 ♗xh2 8 ♘xh2 ♕h4+ 9 ♘f2 ♕xh2 and Black wins easily or 7 ♘xd6+ ♕xd6 and Black is better as his knight is immune due to the mate threat. This leaves 7 d4 ♘xf1 8 ♔xf1 ♗f5 9 ♘xd6+ ♕xd6, when Black recovered the pawn with a sound position and a safe king in Z.Krzisnik-B.Ivkov, Belgrade 1952.

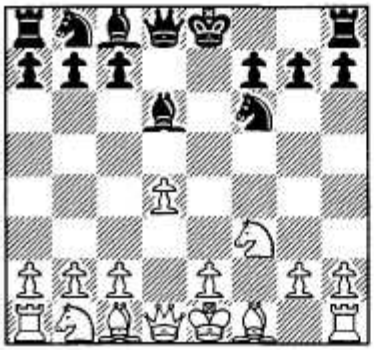
b) 5 g3 might be good against the Lasker but here it looks mistaken as Black is given an immediate object of attack (...h7-h5-h4xg3). In the Lasker Black is committed to ...g7-g5-g4, making a subsequent thrust of the h-pawn much harder to implement. After 5...h5 Black has done quite well in practice:

b1) 6 d3 h4 7 gxh4 ♘g4 8 ♗g5 f6 9 ♗d2 ♗c5 10 e3 ♗xe3 11 ♕e2 0-0 12 ♗xe3 ♖e8 13 ♗f4 ♖xe2+ 14 ♗xe2 ♘c6 15 ♘c3 ♘d4 16 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 17 ♖f1 ♘e3 and White was in trouble in L.Rodi-M.Tempone, Mar del Plata 1994.

b2) 6 ♗g2 h4 7 gxh4 ♘g4 8 d4 ♘xh2 9 ♕d3 ♗g3+ 10 ♔d1 (L.Gimnopoulos-K.Moutousis, Chania 1992) and now 10...♘g4 looks good.

b3) 6 d4 h4 7 gxh4 (7 ♘xh4 ♘e4) 7...♘c6 8 c3 ♗f5 9 ♗g5 ♕d7 10 ♘bd2

0-0-0 11 ♕a4 ♔b8 12 ♗xf6 gxf6 13 d5 ♘b4 14 ♕xd7 ♘c2+ 15 ♔d1 ♘e3+ 16 ♔e1 ♖xd7 17 ♖c1 ♘xd5 18 c4 ♘e3 19 c5 ♗f4 20 ♖c3 ♗e6 21 b3 ♖g8 and Black had a nice bind in D.Buchy-I.Rausis, France 1996.

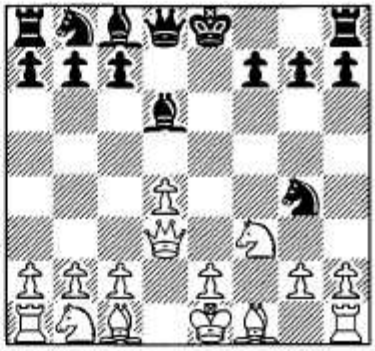


5...♘g4

The first step on the road to madness! We have already seen 5...♘e4 in Bird-Blackburn, Game 2, when Black had little or nothing for the pawn after 6 ♘c3 f5 7 ♕d3 ♕e7 8 ♘b5!, although perhaps White's sixth and seventh moves should be reversed in order to eliminate even the minimal compensation of doubled pawns that could have occurred in the game after 6...♘xc3. For the conservative 5...0-0 see Game 42 (I'm not so sure 'conservative' and 'gambit' go together!).

6 ♕d3

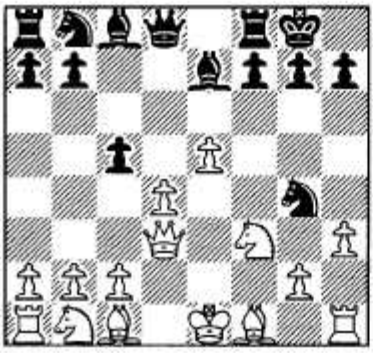
By now this should be a familiar defensive/aggressive queen placement in the From. Here White prevents the direct 6....♘xh2, which worked for Ivkov (note to White's fifth move) above. After 6 ♕d3 the same move loses as White has a square for the king, while Black gets stuck in a nasty pin – 6...♘xh2? 7 ♘xh2 ♕h4+ 8 ♔d1 ♗xh2 9 ♘d2 and White emerges a piece up in all variations, e.g. 9...♕g3 (9...♘c6 10 ♘f3, or 9...♗g4 10 ♕e4+ ♔d8 11 ♕xb7 ♖e8 12 ♕xa8 and Black has no real compensation for the rook) 10 ♘f3 etc. The other capture also loses – 6...♗xh2? 7 ♘xh2 ♕h4+ 8 g3 when, first, White's queen defends, and then after 8...♕h5 9 ♕e4+ attacks! Black loses the house after 9...♗e6 10 ♘xg4 (note that White's rook is defended). Once again the key anti-From piece is White's queen!



6...c5

Black has to try to break up White's centre. In the event of 6...♘c6 White should avoid 7 ♕e4+?! ♗e6! 8 ♘g5 (8 d5?! ♗c5!) 8...♘f6 9 ♕d3 ♘b4 when Black is clearly better (which was not the case in A.Berescu-A.Kutnik, Bucharest 1999, which went 7...♘e7? 8 ♘c3 c6 9 ♕d3 ♕c7 10 ♘e4 ♗f5 11 ♘xd6+ ♕xd6 12 e4 ♗g6 13 ♘h4 ♖d8 14 c3 c5 15 ♗e2 ♘e5 16 ♕b5+ ♘d7 17 ♘xg6 hxg6 18 e5 ♕c7 19 0-0 0-0 20 ♗g5 ♖de8 21 ♗c4 ♘b6 22 ♗xf7+ ♔h7 23 e6 ♖d8 24 ♕d3 1-0). Best is 7 c3 0-0 8 e4 with a powerful centre. Oleinikov gives 8...♖e8 9 ♗e2 ♘xh2 10 e5 and wins due to (for

example) the problem on h7, e.g. 10...♘f3+ 11 gxf3! etc. Also poor is the overly quiet 6...0-0, even though this is cited as a playable alternative in *ECO* – alas, the analysis is incorrect. The line continues 7 e4 c5 ('!' in *ECO*, but Black is almost lost now) 8 e5 ♗e7 (8...♖e8 9 ♗e2 is no better) and now *ECO* gives 9 d5 ♖e8 10 ♗e2 ♗h4+ with compensation for the material in the game V.Pirc-T.Tylor, Hastings 1938. The only problem with this note is that 9 h3! (unmentioned by *ECO*) busts the line!



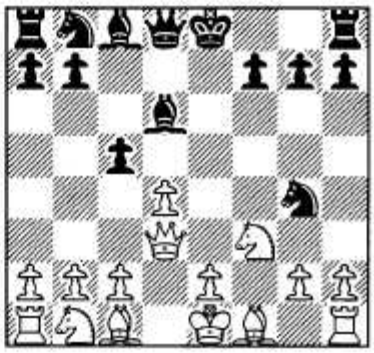
The fundamental idea is that the black knight has no good retreat.

Black has three tries:

a) 9...♘h6 10 ♗xh6 gxh6 (10...♗h4+? 11 g3 ♗xg3+ 12 ♔d1 and wins because of the pin on the g-file) 11 c3 (11 ♕e4!? [intending ♗d3] 11...f5 12 ♗c4+ ♔g7 13 ♕d3 with good attacking chances) 11...cxd4 12 cxd4 and Black has nothing for the pawn.

b) 9...♗h4+ 10 ♘xh4 ♕xh4+ 11 g3 ♕h5 12 ♗g2 (even simpler is 12 ♕f3 ♘f6 13 ♗c2 ♕xf3 14 ♗xf3 ♘fd7 15 c3 with a sound extra pawn) 12...♘h6 13 ♗f3 ♕g6 14 ♕xg6 hxg6 15 dxc5 ♖e8 16 ♘c3 ♖xe5+ 17 ♔f2 ♖xc5 18 ♗e3 and White's bishops are so dominating the position can already be assessed as winning.

c) 9...c4 10 ♕c3 ♘c6 11 a3 ♗h4+ 12 ♘xh4 ♕xh4+ 13 g3 ♕h5 14 ♗g2 ♘h6 15 ♗f3 ♕g6 16 g4 ♖d8 17 ♗e3 and Black's forces aren't even playing, while White has a good extra pawn.



7 ♕e4+

It isn't in White's interest to take on c5 and force the exchange of queens here, as he pays too high a price in broken pawns and a vulnerable king: 7 dxc5?! ♗xc5 8 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9 c3 ♗f2+ (9...♘f2 10 ♖g1 ♘g4 11 ♖h1 ♘f2 with a draw is also possible) 10 ♔d1 (L.Wiest-M.Fischer, Bayern 1997) and now Black should play the accurate 10...♗c5 11 ♔c2 ♗f5+ with an excellent attack that is clearly worth more than a pawn. 7 c3 ♘c6 can't be recommended, either, as Black's lead in development has become alarming!

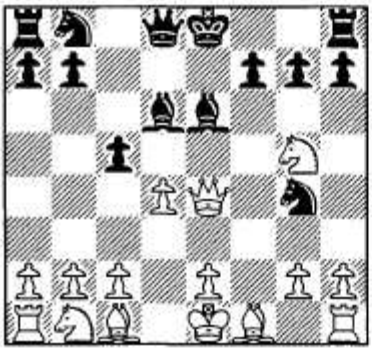
Therefore White sharpens the position even more by attacking with the anti-From queen!

7...♗e6

7...♗e7 8 e3 0-0 9 ♗d3 f5 10 ♗c4+ ♔h8 11 ♕d3 leaves Black with nothing

for the pawn, and 7...♕e7 8 ♕xe7+ ♗xe7 9 e3 is even worse, White trading queens without breaking up his centre.

8 ♘g5



This leads to delightfully wacky variations but is hardly White's only choice:

a) 8 d5 ♘f6 9 ♕a4+ ♗d7 10 ♕b3 ♕c7 11 ♗g5 and Black still has to demonstrate compensation for the pawn.

b) 8 ♕xb7 ♘d7 9 ♕c6 ♕b8 10 e4 cxd4 11 ♘xd4 ♘ge5 12 ♕a4 and again one questions Black's compensation.

I'd say 8 d5 is the way to go for those seeking a more controlled position.

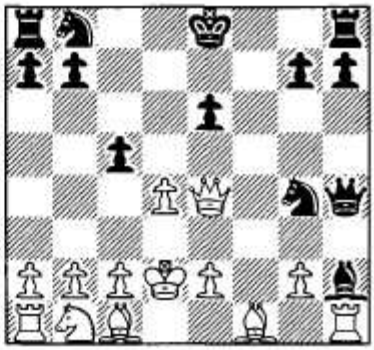
8...♗xh2

Black has to go for it since everything else loses! 8...♘f6? 9 ♘xe6 ♘xe4 (even worse is 9..♕a5+ 10 ♗d2 ♘xe4 [10...♕xd2+ 11 ♘xd2 ♘xe4 12 ♘xe4 finishes Black] 11 ♘xg7+ ♔f8 12 ♗xa5 and White is up two good pawns) 10 ♘xd8 ♔xd8 11 ♘d2 ♘xd2 12 dxc5 ♗xc5 13 ♗xd2 and Black has nothing for the pawn. Additionally, after 8...♕f6 9 ♘xe6 ♕xe6 10 ♕xb7 ♗xh2 11 ♖xh2 ♘xh2 12 ♗f4! White develops while taking all of Black's pieces, with an easy win.

9 ♘xe6 ♕h4+

This is clearly the only move as 9...♗g3+ loses to 10 ♔d2 ♘f2 11 ♘xd8+ ♘xe4+ 12 ♔e3 ♘f2 13 ♖h5 ♔xd8 14 ♔f3, while 9...♕a5+ is abruptly busted by 10 b4! cxb4 11 ♘xg7+.

10 ♔d2 fxe6



11 ♖xh2

11 ♕xe6+ ♔d8 was played in T.Falk-V.Hoehne, Hessen 1991, and a draw was agreed here, but Black has good chances with his threat of 12...♗f4+.

11...♕g5+ 12 e3 ♘xh2 13 ♕xe6+ ♕e7

Both 13...♔d8 and 13...♔f8 lose to 14 ♕d6+, while Fritz offers 13...♔d8 14 ♕d6+ ♘d7 15 ♕xh2 ♖f8 16 ♗e2 cxd4 17 ♔d1 dxe3 18 c4 ♖f2 19 ♘c3 ♕xg2 20 ♕xg2 ♖xg2 21 ♗xe3 with a winning ending.

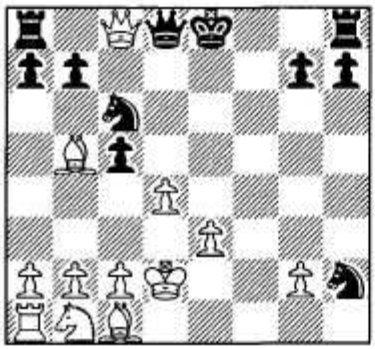
14 ♕c8+ ♕d8

Black avoids 14...♔f7 15 ♗c4+ ♔f6 16 ♕xh8. In fact we can conclude that the position after 14...♕d8 is essentially forced after 9 ♘g5. This has to be one of the weirdest positions in all opening theory – and so frightening to high rated players that not a single GM has dared to play either side since Mestel in 1978! Indeed, since our memorable Lone Pine

'madness on the chessboard' encounter the line has barely been played at all under any circumstances (although we will see two computers battle it out in the notes to the next move!).

How can we evaluate this position? With great difficulty! The only thing I can say with certainty is that White can take a draw here, if he wishes, with 15 ♕e6+ ♕e7 (15...♔f8 16 ♕f5+ ♕f6 17 ♕xc5+ ♕e7 18 ♕f5+ ♕f7 19 ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 20 ♗c4+ ♔e8 21 ♘c3 and White is better, with two pawns for the exchange) 16 ♕c8+ and a repetition. So being an untitled player at the time of this game (I made my first IM norm at this tournament) I could have forced a draw against a GM but, as I say, I play the Bird to win! And I had my innovation ready ...

15 ♗b5+ ♘c6

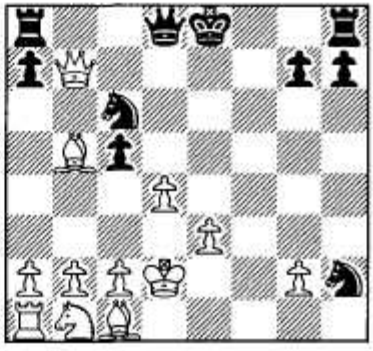


Black has no choice, as a couple of computers would show later. 15...♘d7? (how could a computer make this blunder?) just loses a piece without any loss of time on White's part (the knight goes with check), COMP Patzer-COMP Crafty, WinBoard 1998 seeing White demonstrate the technical side in classic computer style: 16 ♗xd7+ ♔e7 17 ♕xd8+ ♖hxd8 18 ♗h3 cxd4 19 ♔e2 ♔f6 20 ♘a3 g5 21 ♗d2 g4 22 ♖h1 gxh3 23 gxh3 ♖d7 24 ♖xh2 dxe3 25 ♗xe3 and White emerged well ahead.

This is the crucial position (after 15...♘c6) of the entire Mestel variation, and with it the point of decision. White has two plausible but incalculable moves, namely my choice here, 16 ♕xb7, winning a piece but allowing Black to castle, or my opponent's choice in Crick-Taylor (Game 41 – actually played a few months before Taylor-Mestel), which was 16 ♗xc6+, when White does not get a piece but rather three pawns for the exchange, and Black is unable to castle.

16 ♕xb7

This was my prepared move. Fritz 8 claims a decisive lead for White with a 2.75 advantage (the equivalent of being three pawns up), but just three moves later evaluates the game as equal – and this with neither side making a mistake! Clearly the position is too complex for the computer, which is kind of nice to know. But what would Hydra make of it? We'll see if my challenge is accepted!

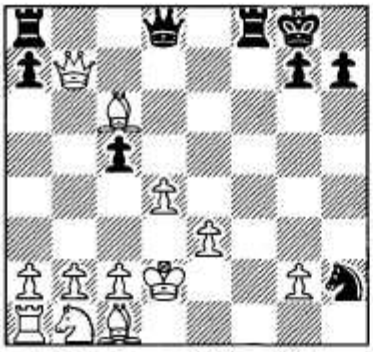


16...0-0

Black castles and has a safe king and active pieces in compensation for the material – after the imminent capture on c6 White has two bishops and two pawns against a rook. This is a huge material advantage, but not a single one of White's queenside pieces has yet moved (and two of them can't). But if White can somehow consolidate even for a second his points lead will become overwhelming.

17 ♗xc6

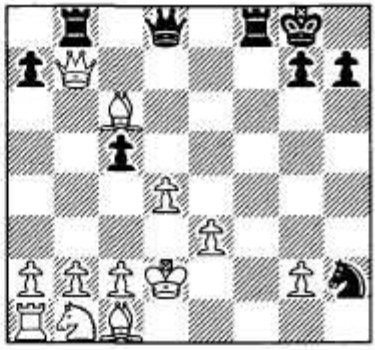
Capturing this way gains an important tempo and is therefore preferable to the alternative 17 ♕xc6 cxd4 18 ♔c2 ♕g5, when White's weaknesses (c1, e3, g2) provide Black with adequate compensation.



17...♖b8

Both players are making the best moves! The alternative 17...♖c8 is too slow – 18 c4 cxd4 19 ♗d5+ ♔h8 20 exd4 ♕g5+ 21 ♔c2 ♖f2+ 22 ♔b3 the hit on the black queen means that White has just enough time to escape to the a-file. Play can continue 22...♕g3+ 23 ♔a4 ♖b8 24 ♕xa7 ♕d6 25 ♕c5 ♕a6+ 26 ♕a5 ♕g6 27 ♘a3! (development, even at the cost of the queen!) 27...♖f6 28 b4! ♖a6 29 ♗f4 (decisive) 29...♖xa5+ 30 bxa5 ♖d8 31 ♗xh2 ♖xd5 32 cxd5 ♕xg2 33 ♖c1 h5 34 d6!! and White wins the race. A truly hair-raising variation, but as far as I can see it checks out.

Needless to say, Mestel and I could not calculate all these moves at the board, and had to go a lot on feel. Here he correctly realized that he had to operate with concrete threats, hence the attack on my queen.



18 ♕d7

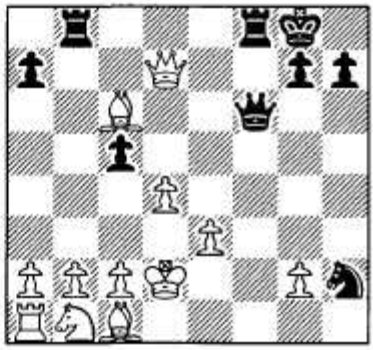
But this is where we need Hydra, or Kasparov! I have to admit that I simply can't answer the basic question of who stands better. I may have to resort to the dreaded 'unclear' assessment that I hate to see in opening books, but the fact is, I've been looking at this position for close to 30 years and I still don't know who's better! My otherwise fearless Fritz is equally confused, if not more so. Consider this: White has no less than four plausible candidate moves available, namely 18 ♕d7 (my choice in the game), 18 ♕xa7, 18 ♕a6 and 18 ♗d5+. Fritz lists 18 ♕xa7 as its number one pick, and claims a three point winning advantage to White. Then it gives the follow-

ing plausible variation, which has no obvious blunders: 18 ♕xa7 ♖b6 19 ♕d7 ♕f6 20 ♗d5+ ♔h8 21 c3 ♖d6 22 ♕b7 cxd4 23 exd4 ♖b6 24 ♕a7 ♕f2+ and suddenly Fritz realizes that Black (who was 'lost' up to here according to the computer) now has a forced mate in 14! I verified that this is true – you can check it out yourself: 25 ♔d3 ♕f1+ 26 ♔c2 ♕f5+ 27 ♔d2 ♘f1+ 28 ♔e1 ♖e8+ and the rest is easy. What does this mean? Does 18 ♕xa7 lose by force? Or was one of those plausible moves in fact a blunder? This is a question I can't answer definitively, but I can give a human answer as to why I didn't take the pawn. My reasoning had nothing to do with long and involved calculations (virtually impossible anyway in such a complex position) but rather with feel. As I recall, I viewed it like this: 'If I take the a-pawn, then Black plays ...♖b6 and gains a tempo off my bishop, while more or less shutting my queen out of play – so why should I waste time taking another pawn I really don't need?'

Notice I look all of *one* move ahead there, but my feel for the situation might (and again I say might) be more accurate than the initial computer evaluation of a decisive advantage to White. What about the other moves? Don't ask me – I don't know – but if you can figure it out, do tell!

18...♕f6

Black, likewise, has many alternatives now that we have entered the mad world of the Full Mestel! Perhaps the continuation 18...♕a5+!? 19 ♘c3 ♘f1+ is worth looking at as an alternate way of pressing the attack.



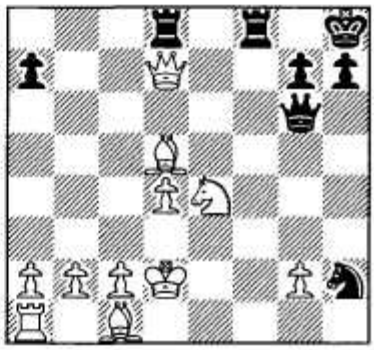
19 ♘c3

I was trying to develop and didn't want to be too materialistic. For example 19 ♕d5+ ♔h8 20 ♕xc5 is too dangerous after 20...♖bc8 21 d5 ♖fd8 22 ♕d4 ♕f1, when it is difficult to see how White, pinned in every direction, can possibly disentangle.

19...cxd4 20 exd4 ♖bd8

Just like White's 15th move, this is a risky attempt to win. Black could stop the madness now with 20...♕f4+ 21 ♔d1 ♕f1+ 22 ♔d2 ♕f4+ 23 ♔d3 ♕f1+ and White has nothing better than to allow the perpetual.

21 ♘e4 ♕g6 22 ♗d5+ ♔h8



23 ♕e7?!

It is very possible that this is where I missed my best chance to win – 23 ♕e6! ♕xg2+ 24 ♔c3 ♖fe8 (24...♖f3+ 25 ♔b4 ♕xc2 26 b3 and it looks like White might escape and win) 25 ♕f5 ♖f8 26 ♘g5 ♕g3+ 27 ♕d3 ♕xd3+ 28 ♔xd3 ♖xd5 29 c4 ♖d7 30 d5 ♖f1 31 b4! and the position is still unclear but White has a pawn for the exchange, extremely dangerous connected passed pawns and, most important of all, the bishop is finally coming out to b2! I say that White is better, but that's a human's feel for the position!

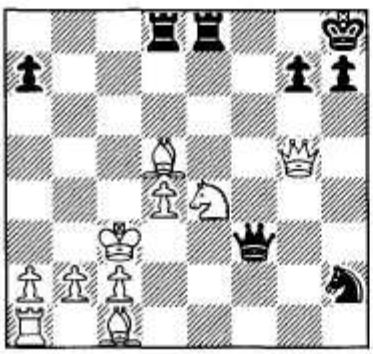
23...♕xg2+

Now Black has a dangerous attack.

24 ♔c3 ♖fe8 25 ♕g5 ♕f3+

The difference between this position and the one in the note to White's 23rd is that Black has this checking square available (in the note above the white queen was on f5 and the white knight controlled g3 – in the game White plays inefficiently, using two pieces to control g3, while f3 is left unattended). Consequently Black is able to work his way closer with the queen.

26 ♔c4 ♕e2+ 27 ♔c3 ♕f3+



28 ♔c4

I should have realized that Mestel didn't want a draw, so running for my life with 28 ♔b4! was called for.

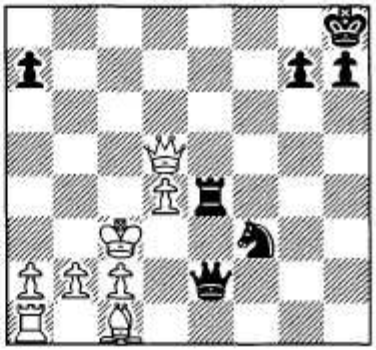
28...♕e2+ 29 ♔c3 ♘f3! 30 ♕f5

Too late!

30....♖xd5

Black is better after this, but 30...♕d1! would have killed me immediately!

31 ♕xd5 ♖xe4



32 ♗f4

32 b3 improves, but after 32...h6 33 ♔b2 ♖xd4 34 ♕f7 ♕e5 Black still has a dangerous attack.

32...h6 33 ♕f5 ♘xd4

Strangely enough, material is level now, but Black has a safe king while White's is in even more peril than I thought!

34 ♕f8+ ♔h7 35 ♖c1 ♘b5+ 36 ♔b3 ♕c4 mate!

A fantastic win by GM Mestel. Both players could have taken draws; both players took risks. What is the verdict on my 16 ♕xb7 which, as far as I know, has never been played in a published game since? I can only give a one word answer – Unclear!

Now let's look at White's other major try on the 16th move.

Game 41
Crick-T.Taylor
Wellsboro Open 1977

The following game was played in the last round of a small open tournament. Both of us stood at 4-0, and both of us were going for the win! So, like Becerra in a similar situation (Game 35) I played the From in an attempt to sharpen the play, but I didn't expect the insane melee that followed!

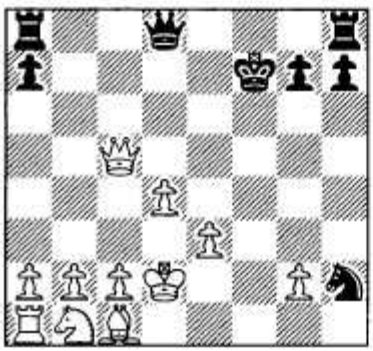
1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 ♗xd6 4 ♘f3 ♘f6 5 d4 ♘g4 6 ♕d3 c5 7 ♕e4+ ♗e6 8 ♘g5 ♗xh2 9 ♘xe6 ♕h4+ 10 ♔d2 fxe6 11 ♖xh2 ♕g5+ 12 e3 ♘xh2 13 ♕xe6+ ♕e7 14 ♕c8+ ♕d8 15 ♗b5+

Although I was the higher rated player in this case, Crick plays for the win.

15...♘c6 16 ♗xc6+

Of course against Mestel I would later play 16 ♕xb7 here.

16...bxc6 17 ♕xc6+ ♔f7 18 ♕xc5



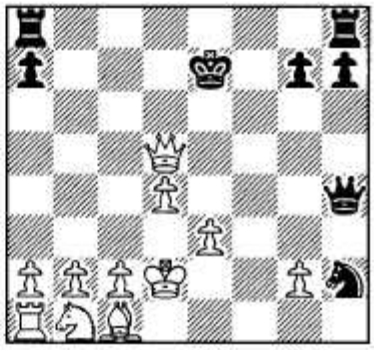
The key position of this variation. Here White has three pawns for the exchange, as opposed to White having two bishops plus two pawns against a rook in the Mestel game. However, material isn't everything, and this time Black does *not* have the ...c5xd4 lever, which means White's king is much safer, while Black's can't castle and so his king is much more exposed to checks.

18...♖f8!

Once again we have an insanely complicated position where the right path is not at all apparent to man or machine. I choose the sharpest move, sacrificing a piece for king safety with a means to starting a rapid attack with the heavy pieces. Even now I believe this is the best move, but the position is fantastically complicated – I want to make it clear that I am not making any definitive pronouncements on these positions!

Two other moves have been tried (unlike my 16 ♕xb7 against Mestel, the 16 ♗xc6+ variation has actually been played a few times):

a) 18...♕h4 19 ♕d5+ ♔e7



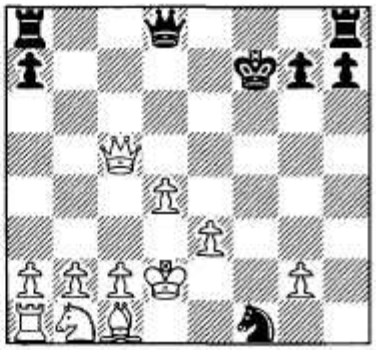
and now:

a1) 20 ♕e5+ ♔f7 21 ♕f5+ ♔e8? (21...♕f6 and now White is in trouble after 22 ♕xf6+ gxf6 23 ♔d3 ♖hg8 24 ♘c3 ♖xg2 25 e4 ♖g1 26 ♘b5 ♖ag8 27 b3 ♖d1+ 28 ♔c3 ♖gg1, while if White

goes after the piece with 22 ♕h5+ g6 23 ♕xh2 Black has a chance for a savage king hunt: 23...♕f2+ 24 ♔c3 ♖hc8+ 25 ♔b4 ♖ab8+ 26 ♔a3 ♕xc2 27 ♘d2 ♖b6 28 ♕xh7+ ♔f6 29 ♕xa7 ♕c7!! [the queen can't be taken because of mate in two] 30 ♘e4+ ♔f5 31 ♕a4 ♔xe4 and even Black's king takes part in the attack) 22 b3 (now White does achieve this key move, promoting both development and king safety) 22...♕f6 23 ♕h5+ g6 24 ♕xh2 ♕f2+ 25 ♔c3 ♖c8+ 26 ♔b4 ♕f8+ 27 ♔a4 (the king escapes!) 27...♕f6 28 c4 h5 29 ♘c3 ♖h7 30 ♕e5+ (White is winning) 30...♕xe5 31 dxe5 ♖c6 32 ♘e4 ♔d8 33 ♗d2 h4 34 ♖f1 h3 35 gxh3 ♖xh3 36 ♖f8+ ♔c7 37 ♗a5+ ♔d7 38 e6+ ♖xe6 39 ♘c5+ ♔e7 40 ♘xe6 ♖xe3 41 ♗b4+ 1-0, S.Von Oettingen-S.Sosnick, 10th Davis Rated Tournament 1967.

a2) In my opinion the key factor here is development, so I suggest 20 b3!, when play can continue 20...♕f2+ 21 ♔c3 ♖ac8+ (21...♖hc8+ 22 ♔b4 ♕xc2 23 ♗a3 ♔f6 24 e4 g6 25 ♔a4 and White's attack is more dangerous than Black's, e.g. 25...♘g4 26 ♘c3! ♕c3 27 ♖f1+! ♔g7 28 ♖c1!! and White comes out on top) 22 ♔b4 ♖xc2 23 ♗a3! (my idea: White will give up minor pawns to get his pieces out) 23...♕xe3 (23...♖xa2 24 ♖xa2 ♕xa2 25 ♔a4+ ♔f6 26 ♘c3 ♕c2 27 ♘e4+ ♔g6 28 ♕e6+ ♔h5 29 ♕f5+ ♔h4 30 ♕g5 mate!) 24 ♕f5 ♕xd4+ 25 ♔a5+ ♔e8 26 ♕xc2 ♕b6+ 27 ♔a4 ♕a6+ 28 ♔b4 ♕b6+ 29 ♔c3 ♕f6+ 30 ♔d2! ♕xa1 (White can evade the checks after 30...♕f4+) 31 ♔c1 ♕f6 32 ♕c8+ ♔f7 33 ♕xh8 ♕f1+ 34 ♔b2 ♕xg2+ 35 ♔a1 and White should win with the extra piece. Of course this is a very long variation, but I think the attacking possibilities created by 20 b3 mean that White has good winning chances.

b) 18...♘f1+

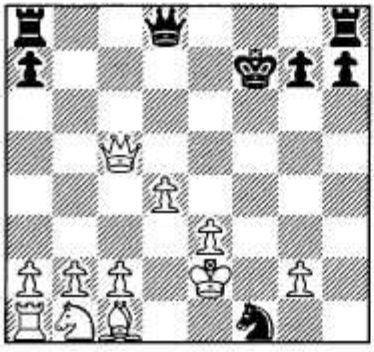


and White has tried three king moves:

b1) 19 ♔d3 (I think this is best as the king is safer on the queenside in the company of the pawns) 19...♖f8 20 ♘c3 ♔g8 21 ♕d5+ ♕xd5 22 ♘xd5 ♖f2 23 c4 ♖xg2 24 c5 h5 25 e4 ♘g3 26 ♗f4! (White gets his queen's bishop out and stands much better with his dangerously mobile connected passed pawns) 26...h4 27 ♘e3 ♖xb2 and now in P.Korning-F.Vester, Correspondence 1973 White could have won with the accurate 28 c6! ♖f2 29 ♗xg3 hxg3 30 d5 ♔f7 31 ♖g1 ♖xa2 32 ♘c4 g2 33 ♘d6+ ♔e7 34 e5 a5 35 ♘f5+ ♔f7 36 c7 a4 37 ♘d6+ ♔e7 38 c8♕ ♖xc8 39 ♘xc8+ ♔d7 40 ♘b6+ ♔c7 41 d6+ ♔xb6 42 e6 ♔c6 43 d7 ♔c7 44 ♖c1 etc. Instead he gave his opponent another chance with 28 d5? when, after 28...♘xe4!, he had to win the game all over again. He managed to do this in a very messy but entertaining fashion, and I can't resist giving the complete

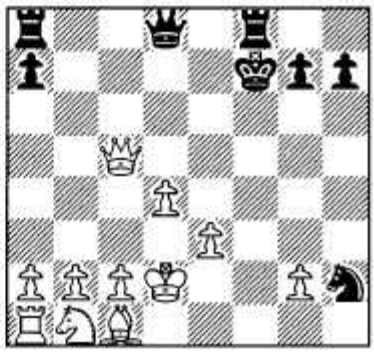
game just for the fantastic final three moves: 29 c6 (29 ♔xe4 ♖b4+ 30 ♔e5 ♖e8+ 31 ♔f5 ♖f8+) 29...♖e8 30 c7 ♖d2+ 31 ♔c4 g5 32 ♗e5 ♔f7 33 ♘f1 ♖f2 34 ♔d4 ♘d2 35 ♘h2 ♖e2 36 ♗d6 ♘e4 37 ♖f1+ ♔g6 38 ♗e5 ♘g3 39 ♖f6+ ♔h5 40 ♘f3 g4 41 ♖e6 ♖c8 42 ♘xh4 ♖d2+ 43 ♔e3 ♘f1+ 44 ♔e4 g3 45 ♘g6 ♖e2+ 46 ♔d4 ♖d2+ 47 ♔c5 ♖c2+ 48 ♔b5 ♖8xc7 49 ♗xc7 ♖xc7 50 d6 a6+ 51 ♔xa6 ♖c4 52 d7 ♖d4 53 ♘e5 g2 54 ♖e8 ♖d6+ 55 ♔b5 g1♕ 56 ♖h8+ ♔g5 57 ♘f7+! ♔f4 58 ♘xd6! ♕g5+ 59 ♔a6! 1-0 (there are no checks and White makes a queen, emerging a full rook ahead).

b2) P.Jankovic-R.Lloyd, Correspondence 1976 went 19 ♔e2



19...♕f6? (a blunder – Black should play 19...♖f8 as in 'b3') 20 ♕d5+ ♔g6 21 ♕e4+ ♔f7 22 ♕f3! ♕xf3+ 23 gxf3 ♘g3+ 24 ♔f2 ♘f5 25 c3 ♖ac8 26 ♘a3 ♖c6 27 e4 ♘d6 28 ♗d2 and White had exchanged queens, obtained an imposing centre and developed his pieces! This is not how Black should play – Black *must* attack before White completes development, as now the three pawns for the exchange win easily. The game ended 28...♖e8 29 ♖e1 ♘c4 30 ♘xc4 ♖xc4 31 b3 ♖c6 32 c4 ♖a6 33 ♖a1 ♖b8 34 ♗c3 ♖bb6 35 d5 ♖h6 36 ♗e5 ♖a3 37 c5 1-0.

b3) 19 ♔e1 ♖f8! (Black sacrifices a piece to lure White to the undefended kingside) 20 ♔xf1 ♔g8+ 21 ♔g1 ♕h4 22 ♗d2 (22 ♕c4+? ♖f7 23 ♕e2 ♖af8 24 ♘d2 ♖f2 25 ♘f3 [25 ♕c4+ ♔h8 26 b3 ♖xg2+ and mates] 25...♖8xf3! 26 ♕xf3 ♖xf3 27 gxf3 ♕g3+ 28 ♔h1 ♕xf3+ 29 ♔h2 h5 and Black wins easily) 22...♕f2+ (Black takes a draw, but I think he should play for a win with 22...♖f7 and 23...♖af8, as above) 23 ♔h2 ♕h4+ ½-½, K.Rakay-S.Matas, Hlohovec 1975.



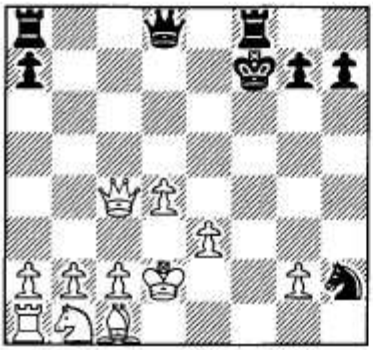
19 ♕c4+!

White wisely resists the temptation of taking the piece, after which my overall analysis (using computer, board, and feel) leads me to favour Black. Let's take a look: 19 ♕h5+ ♔g8 20 ♕xh2 ♕a5+ (this was my idea during the game) 21 ♘c3 (I considered only this during play, but White also has 21 c3 and even 21 b4 – yes, I know this makes the position virtually incalculable!) 21...♖f2+ 22 ♔e1 ♖af8 and I stopped here, thinking Black was winning. After all, White can't develop his bishop: 22 ♗d2 ♖f1+ 23 ♔e2 ♕a6+ and mates! And even if White

plays differently on move 22, I am still threatening ...♕a6! And how can White ever develop his queenside even if he can avoid mate? So Black is winning, no? Well, it's not that simple.

White does have 23 ♕d6!! (remember the key anti-From piece is the white queen!), which takes away a6 from the black queen and threatens ♕d5+. Now is White winning? No, I still think Black is better, as White's queenside can't be developed. Here is one possible continuation (of many) that illustrates the ideas within the position (basically Black tries to win White's pinned bishop while advancing the kingside pawns) – 23...♖xg2 24 ♕d5+ ♕xd5 25 ♘xd5 ♖g1+ 26 ♔e2 ♖ff1 27 c4 ♖xc1 28 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 29 c5 ♔f7 30 b4 ♖c2+ 31 ♔d3 ♖xa2 32 b5 h5 33 c6 ♔e6 34 ♘c7+ ♔e7 35 e4 h4 36 d5 h3 37 e5 h2 38 d6+ ♔f7 39 e6+ ♔f6 40 d7 h1♕ 41 d8♕+ ♔g6 and Black wins by the slimmest margin possible!

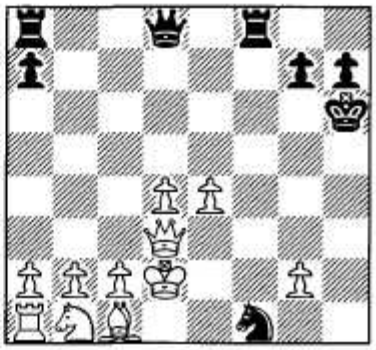
Obviously this line gives new meaning to 'razor sharp' and I'm sure there are improvements for both sides, but going back to 'feel' I'd say Black is better if the piece is accepted. White must be able to develop!



19...♔g6 20 ♕d3+ ♔h6

Black can't play for a draw with 20...♔f7 (if he wants one!) as White has 21 ♕xh7!, picking off a vital kingside pawn and attacking the knight.

21 e4 ♘f1+



22 ♔d1+?

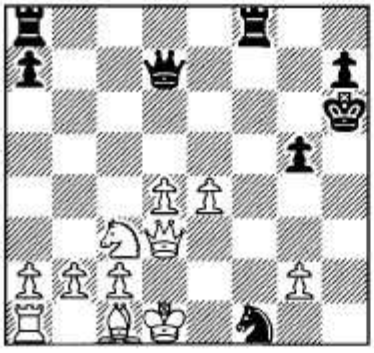
But I believe *this* natural move is White's critical mistake! Now White's king is trapped on the back rank, subject to attack and skewering threats against the undeveloped queenside pieces. White may stand better after the Steinitzian 22 ♔c3+!, e.g. 22...g5 23 ♘a3! and White plans to shelter his king with ♘c4 and b2-b4. For instance after 23...♖c8+ 24 ♘c4 ♕a5+ 25 b4 ♕a4 26 a3 (26 ♗b2? ♘e3! 27 ♕e3 ♖c4+ and Black has a winning attack) 26...♖f2 27 ♔b2 White is gradually consolidating, and even threatens the decisive 28 ♗g5+! etc. As I've said before, if White can consolidate and complete development the three pawns for the exchange will win.

22...g5 23 ♘c3?!

This doesn't solve the bishop's problem, and nor does it address Black's dangerous knight. 23 ♘d2 makes more sense and might lead to a draw, e.g.

23...♘xd2 24 ♗xd2 ♕f6! 25 c3 ♕f1+ 26 ♔c2! (26 ♕xf1 ♖xf1+ 27 ♗e1 ♖g1 28 g3 ♔g6! is just what White doesn't want, namely a pinned bishop and mobile enemy kingside pawns, as can be seen – 29 ♔c2 ♖f8 30 c4 h5 31 ♖d1 h4 32 gxh4 g4 33 ♖d2 g3 34 d5 ♖g2+ 35 ♔d1 ♖xd2+ 36 ♗xd2 ♖f1+ 37 ♔c2 ♖f2! and Black wins) 26...♕xa1 27 ♕g3 and White draws by perpetual check, e.g. 27...♖g8 28 ♕h4+ ♔g7 29 ♕xg5+ ♔h8 30 ♕e5+ ♖g7 31 ♗h6 ♖ag8 32 ♗h6+ ♖g7 33 ♕e8+ etc.

23...♕d7!



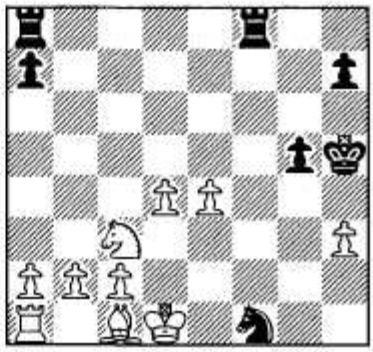
Black prepares to send the queen to hassle White's exposed king.

24 ♕h3+?!

Panic! Now Black assumes the advantage. For better or worse White simply had to develop with 24 ♗d2 when, although Black obviously has a strong attack with 24...♖f2, White has almost all his pieces out and he does still have those imposing centre pawns!

24...♕xh3 25 gxh3 ♔h5

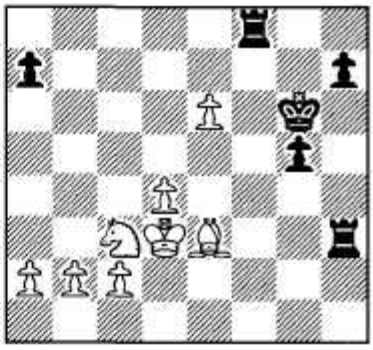
The king is a strong piece! Now we have a race, but Black starts off with much better development. In general White's centre pawns can be slowed up a bit, but Black's kingside pawns are a more difficult prospect.



26 ♗d2 ♖f3 27 ♔e2 ♖af8 28 ♖xf1

White has practically no choice, as otherwise Black's attack is overwhelming, the immediate threat being 28...♖f2+.

28...♖xf1 29 ♗e3 ♖h1 30 e5 ♖h2+ 31 ♔d3 ♖xh3 32 e6 ♔g6



33 d5

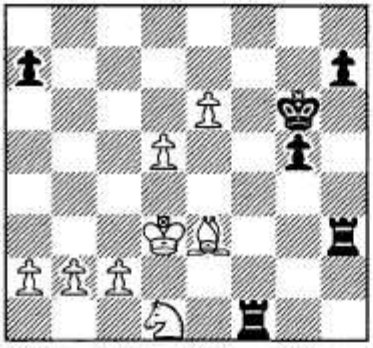
A better try is 33 ♔e4 when Black can lose if he's not careful, e.g. 33...♔f6? 34 d5 g4 35 ♗d4+ ♔g6 36 d6 g3 37 e7 ♖e8 38 ♘d5 g2 39 d7 ♖h4+ 40 ♘f4+ and White queens his pawn while stopping Black's. However, this variation is illusory if Black finds 33...♖f1! 34 ♘d5

(now 34 d5 loses to 34...♖e1) 34...♖h4+ 35 ♔e5 ♖f5+ 36 ♔d6 ♖e4 37 ♘e7+ ♔f6 38 ♘xf5 ♖xe6+ 39 ♔d5 ♔xf5 40 ♗xg5 ♖e2 41 ♗h6 ♖xc2 and Black wins the ending.

33...♖ff3

Black forces the gain of material.

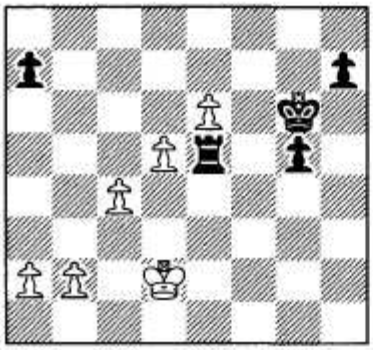
34 ♘d1 ♖f1



35 ♔e2

Or 35 ♘c3 ♖e1 36 ♘e2 ♖d1+ 37 ♔e4 ♖h4+ 38 ♔e5 ♖e1 39 d6 ♖xe2 and Black wins the race: 40 d7 ♖xe3+ 41 ♔d6 ♖xe6+ 42 ♔xe6 ♖d4 43 c4 g4 44 c5 g3 45 c6 g2 46 c7 g1♕ 47 d8♕ ♕e3 mate!

35...♖xd1 36 ♔xd1 ♖xe3 37 ♔d2 ♖e5 38 c4



38...♔f6 39 ♔d3 g4 40 ♔d4 g3 41 d6 g2 0-1

Black promotes with check, with mate to follow shortly.

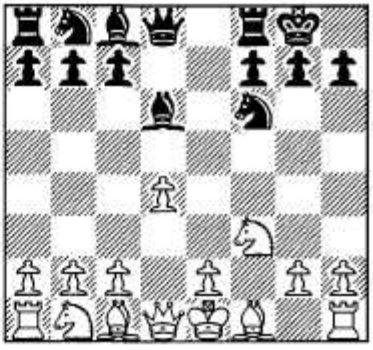
This and the game with Mestel are two of the strangest, most wonderful games I've ever been involved in. I hope you've enjoyed them as much as I have revisiting them and *trying* to understand them but, once again, as to who stands better after 16 ♗xc6+ the verdict must still be unclear! Now back to somewhat more rational play!

Game 42

S.Nyman-B.Larsen

Correspondence 1966

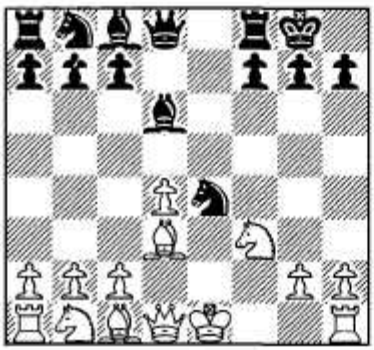
1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 ♗xd6 4 ♘f3 ♘f6 5 d4 0-0



I find it hard to believe that this quiet developing move can give Black full compensation for a centre pawn. Yes, Black avoids the madness of the Full Mestel and gets a playable game – playable but worse! I think White gets at least a slight edge in no less than three ways: the main game's 6 ♗g5, 6 e4 and 6 e3.

6 ♗g5

Simple and good, but of the two main alternatives I rather like 6 e4!?, when White is happy to return the pawn. In fact the idea is quite interesting. Because Black gave away *both* his centre pawns in the opening, even after sacrificing one back White still has the only remaining centre pawn. Furthermore, White gains a development tempo and so will quickly castle, ready to use the Bird f-file for an attack! Note, too, that Black was hoping to attack (by playing a gambit) yet White now has aggression in mind without sacrificing anything! After the forced 6...♘xe4 7 ♗d3



Black has three tries:

a) 7...♖e8 8 0-0 ♗g4 9 ♗xe4 ♖xe4 10 ♕d3 ♗xf3 (10...♖e8? 11 ♘g5 g6 forking h7 and f7) 11 ♕xf3 ♕e8 12 c3 c6 13 ♗g5 ♕e6 14 ♘d2 ♖e2 15 b3 ♘d7 16 ♘c4 ♗c7 17 ♘e3 ♖b2 18 ♖ae1 and White has a winning attack (both 19 ♘c4 and 19 ♘f5 are threatened).

b) 7...♗f5 8 0-0 ♘d7 9 ♘g5 ♘xg5 10 ♖xf5 ♘e6 11 c3 ♘f6 12 ♖f1 h6 13 ♗c2 c6 14 ♘d2 ♕c7 15 ♘f3 ♖ae8 16 ♕d3 (White is better, with a solid centre and attacking chances) 16...g6? (although this is a blunder Black must anyway be careful here, e.g. 16...a5?! 17 ♘e5 ♗xe5 18 ♖xf6! ♗xh2+ 19 ♔h1 g6 20 ♗xh6 ♗f4 21 ♖xg6+ fxg6 22 ♕xg6+ ♔h8 23 ♗xf8 ♖xf8 24 ♕xe6 and White wins, which leaves 16...♘f4! 17 ♗xf4 ♗xf4 18 ♘e5 ♗xe5 19 ♖xf6 ♗xh2+ 20 ♔h1 g6 21 ♗b3 ♔g7 22 ♗xf7 ♔xf6 23 ♕xg6+ ♔e7 24 ♖e1+ ♔d8 25 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 26 ♗xe8 ♕c7! with drawing chances) 17 ♗xh6 ♘g7 18 h3 ♔h7 19 ♕d2 1-0, E.Ressler-U.Boerner, Correspondence 1991.

c) 7...♘f6 8 0-0 ♗g4 9 ♗g5 ♘bd7 10 ♘bd2 c5 11 ♘e4 ♗c7 12 ♕e1 c4 (White gets a typical attack after 12...♗xf3 13 ♖xf3 c4 14 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 15 ♗xh7+! ♔xh7 16 ♕h4+ ♔g8 [or 16...♔g6 17 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 18 ♖g3+ ♔f5 19 ♖e1 and the black king is snared] 17 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 18 ♖h3 and mates) 13 ♘xf6+ ♘xf6 14 ♗xh7+! (White snaps up a delicious pawn!) 14...♔xh7 15 ♕h4+ ♔g8 16 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 17 ♕xg4 was the instructive course of D.Rumens-D.Mooney, Morecambe 1981.

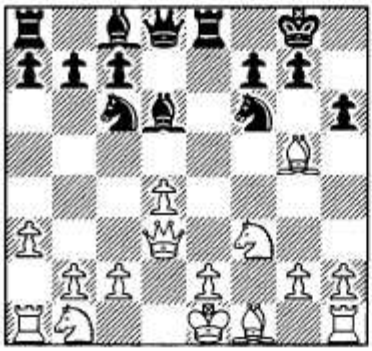
6 e4 is really quite difficult to meet!

And there is another strong move! If Petrosian were alive today and playing the Bird's, I'm sure the wily Tigran would choose the third alternative, namely 6 e3! This unpretentious move carries the typical drop of poison so characteristic of the late champion's style. Black can win back the pawn but, meanwhile, White quietly develops and builds up a positional advantage. Here's a sample: 6 e3 ♖e8 7 ♗d3 ♘g4 (after the inferior 7...c5 8 0-0 ♘c6 9 c3 ♗g4 10 ♘a3 ♖c8 11 ♘c4 ♗f8 12 a4 White held onto his pawn and went on to win in Z.Valenta-K.Kopicka, Czechia 2000) 8

0-0 ♘xe3 9 ♗xe3 ♖xe3 10 ♘bd2 with a small plus for White.

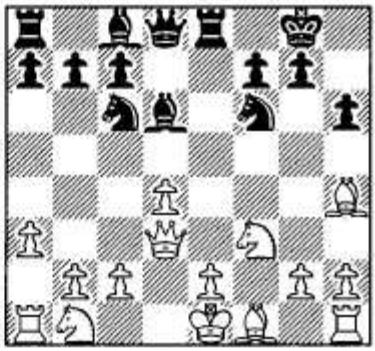
Now back to the game.

6...♖e8 7 ♕d3 ♘c6 8 a3 h6



9 ♗h4??

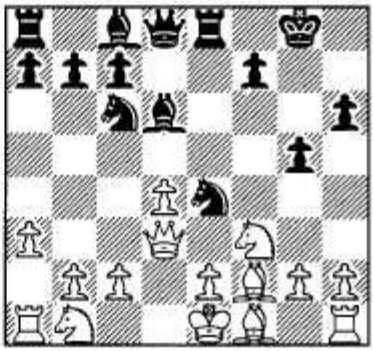
'This is the mistake! And for a strong correspondence player like Nyman, a very grave mistake in my opinion' (Larsen). Clearly correct is 9 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 10 e4 ♗f5, and now Larsen says, 'It's easy for Black to win back his pawn, but the game is about even' – I disagree with the second part of this statement. After 11 ♘c3 ♕g6 (the premature 11...♗xe4 12 ♘xe4 ♕f5 13 ♘fd2 ♗f4 14 ♔d1 sees White hold the extra piece) 12 0-0-0 ♗xe4 13 ♘xe4 ♖xe4 14 ♕b3 ♖ee8 15 ♔b1 ♖ab8 16 ♗d3 ♕f6 (16...♕xg2 17 ♖hg1 with a terrific attack – the knight is immune due to 18 ♗h7+) 17 ♖hf1, while Black has his pawn back, White is clearly better thanks to the centre pawn and attacking chances. 13...♕xe4 might be best, but after 14 ♕xe4 ♖xe4 15 ♗b5 White has an annoying pull in the ending. It is characteristic of the From that if Black's hoped-for attack fails to materialize – even if he recovers the pawn he stands worse. White often retains a positional advantage, such as the two bishops or (here) the more influential centre. In other words, Black still faces an uphill struggle to draw.



9...g5!

'After the text move I expected to win' (Larsen). No argument here!

10 ♗f2 ♘e4



Look how the game has shifted! Black's threat is the highly unpleasant 11...♘xf2 followed by 12...g4, and White's next ugly move can hardly be considered a proper defence.

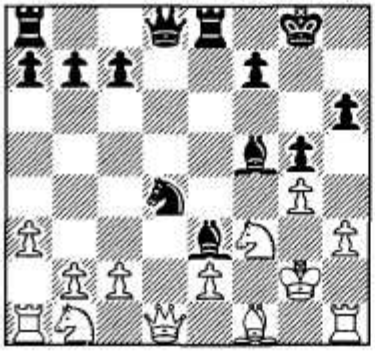
11 h3

11 e3 ♗f5 12 ♕b3 ♘xf2 13 ♔xf2 g4 14 ♘fd2 and now 14...♗f4! is a pretty finish.

11...♗f5 12 ♕d1

No better is 12 ♕b5 ♗g3 13 ♗xg3 (13 ♕xf5 ♗xf2+ 14 ♔d1 ♘xd4 and the attack on the d-file is crushing) 13...♘xg3 14 ♖g1 ♘xd4 and Black wins material or mates.

12...♗f4 13 g4 ♘xf2 14 ♔xf2 ♗e3+ 15 ♔g2 ♘xd4!



Crunch!

16 gxf5

Even more drastic is 16 ♘xd4 ♗e4+ 17 ♔h2 ♕d6 mate!

16...♘xf3 17 ♕xd8 ♘h4+ 18 ♔g3 ♖axd8 19 ♘c3 ♘xf5+

Black is a pawn ahead with a huge lead in development. The contest is effectively over.

20 ♔g2 ♖d2 21 ♖c1 h5 22 ♘d1 ♗b6 23 ♔h2 ♖exe2+ 24 ♗xe2 ♖xe2+ 25 ♘f2 ♖xf2+ 26 ♔g1 ♖e2+ 27 ♔f1 ♘g3 mate!

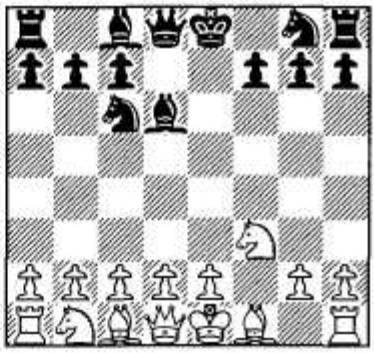
That was drastic punishment for one mistake! (9 ♗h4). Although he won beautifully here, Larsen only played the From this one time in his career ('As a matter of fact, I do not like giving away a centre pawn!' – Larsen). Given the opening improvements and alternatives for White, I agree!

Game 43

H.Danielsen-Heini Danielsen

Torshavn 2000

1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 ♗xd6 4 ♘f3 ♘c6



Sometimes this move is just a transposition, but it can also be an independent system, as is the case here. Black plans ...♗g4 and queenside castling.

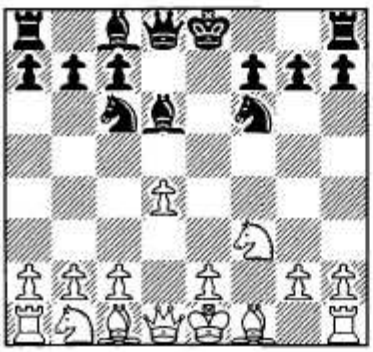
5 d4

Of course this is the simplest response but, since Black eschewed ...♘f6, White could also try to take over the centre with 5 e4. In R.Castillo-J.Berrocal, Santa Cruz 2003, this led to a wild Muzio Gambit kind of position after 5...g5 6 ♗c4!? (6 g3 g4 7 ♘h4 ♕e7 8 ♗g2 f5 9 d4 fxe4 10 ♖f1 ♗d7 11 ♘c3 is a little less crazy and probably favours White) 6...g4 7 0-0 gxf3 8 ♕xf3 ♘e5 9 ♗xf7+ ♔f8 10 ♕h5 ♘f6 11 ♗b3 and White had compensation for the piece.

5...♘f6

The immediate 5...♗g4 is possible, leading to a very short win for me (as White) in a recent game: 6 e3 ♘f6 7 ♗b5 0-0 8 ♘c3 ♘e7 9 e4 ♗b4 10 ♕d3

a6 11 ♗c4 ♘c6 12 ♗e3 ♗xc3+ 13 bxc3 h6 14 0-0 14...♕e7 15 e5 ♘d7 16 ♗xh6! and Black resigned in view of 16...gxh6 17 ♕g6+ ♔h8 18 ♕xh6+ ♔g8 19 ♘g5 and mates, T.Taylor-D.MacIntyre, Minneapolis 2005. This is a drastic lesson in what happens if you play the From without proper preparation! While the game may look like a complete walkover, Black did have his chances had he struck at the centre with 10...c5! instead of spending time on ...a7-a6 and ...♘c6. The best I can find is in looking to the bishop pair for an edge after 11 dxc5 ♕a5 12 0-0 ♖fd8 13 ♕e2 (13 ♕c4? a6) 13...♗xc3 14 bxc3 ♕xc3 15 ♖b1 etc.



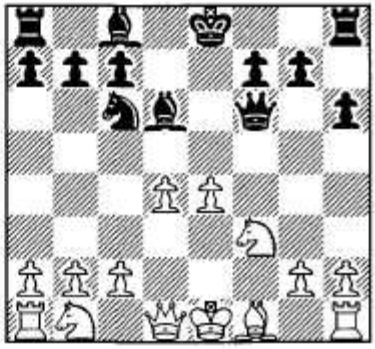
6 ♗g5

The counter-sacrifice 6 e4 does not look as strong here as in the previous game because Black is not committed to castling kingside where, as we saw, White's f-file pressure became very dangerous. However, 6 e3 looks very playable, and if Black continues his plan with 6...♗g4 7 ♗e2 ♕d7 8 0-0 0-0-0 9 c4 White's advantage is clear.

6...h6 7 ♗xf6

There will be no repeat of Nyman's mistake from the previous game (7 ♗h4? would be very bad after 7...g5 8 ♗f2 ♘e4). Instead 'Big D' gives up the bishop pair but assumes control of the centre.

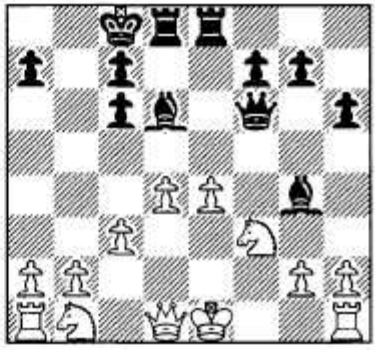
7...♕xf6 8 e4



8...♗g4 9 c3 0-0-0 10 ♗b5

10 ♘bd2 looks like the most logical move, retaining the option of ♗d3 (to shore up the centre pawn) if appropriate.

10...♖he8 11 ♗xc6 bxc6



12 ♘bd2

Again White had a simpler alternative, this time in 12 0-0 ♖xe4 13 ♘bd2 ♖f4 14 ♕a4 with good attacking chances and play against Black's broken queenside pawns; meanwhile White's centre is solid. This is another illustration of how

recovering the pawn hardly solves Black's problems.

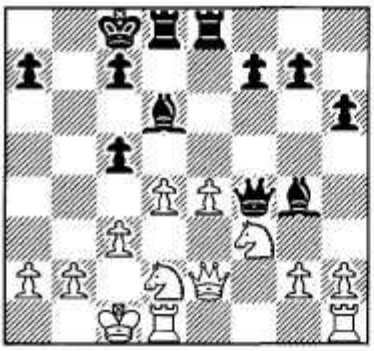
12...♕f4?!

12...c5 (as in Taylor-MacIntyre, note to Black's 5th move, above) is imperative, when Black has counter chances with an immediate attack on White's centre. However, his time-wasting move (unacceptable in a gambit) permits White not only get a rook behind the d-pawn but also put his king in safety, all of which means Black has absolutely nothing for the pawn.

13 ♕e2 c5

Too late!

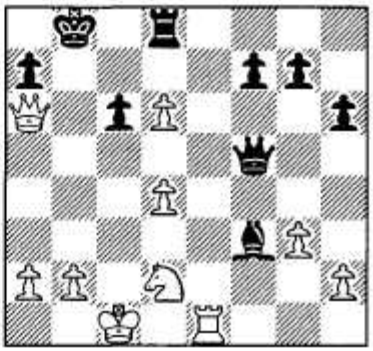
14 0-0-0



White's king is safe, his centre is dominant, and ♕a6+ is on the agenda. Big D finishes with his usual style.

14...cxd4 15 cxd4 c6 16 g3 ♕f6 17 e5 ♕f5 18 ♕a6+ ♔b8 19 exd6 ♗xf3 20 ♖hf1 ♖e3 21 ♖de1! ♖xe1+ 22 ♖xe1 1-0

Just as Black celebrates saving his hitherto pinned bishop, he suddenly realizes that 22...♗h5 23 ♖e7 leads to a forced mate! Meanwhile, 22...♕b5 defends the king but abandons the bishop.



Summary

The Full Mestel, as of this writing, remains unknowable. I would suggest that the Bird player look for improvements for White on the 18th move of Game 40 and the 22nd move of Game 41. The last two games of the chapter are much easier to assess. In fact one could use a simple Chess Informant symbol to describe them both: +/=. Black avoids horrendous complications but such quiet play will never justify a gambit. White maintains a pawn in the centre, and even if he gives back the extra pawn, should always maintain some kind of advantage. But the Bird player should not become over-confident as the From still has teeth, and one mistake (as in Game 42) could swiftly turn the tables!

CHAPTER NINE

Other Froms

When Black answers the Bird with 1...e5 White must immediately come to a decision – accept or decline the gambit. As the reader knows, in my opinion it is best to accept, and take a centre pawn while one can! One can also reverse the situation and return the offer – namely the world famous King's Gambit – by playing 2 e4, but that is of course well outside the scope of this book.

White can decline in a couple of ways. Game 44 shows a method Danielsen has experimented with in which White reaches a sort of King's Gambit Declined position where an early exchange has occurred on e5. Despite Danielsen's success in the game, and in Danielsen-Pokorna, referred to in the notes, I think Black can equalize relatively easily. I also mention the high level encounter Hort-Bronstein in which the former declined with the very quiet 2 d3, but this also fails to give White anything.

Black, in turn, has a way to decline his own gambit, as after 1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 he does not have to make it a true gambit with 2...d6 but can simply try to get the pawn back with 2...♘c6. I don't think this equalizes against best play by White, but the Bird player needs to know how to handle it, for which see Game 45.

Game 44

H.Danielsen-R.Hardarson

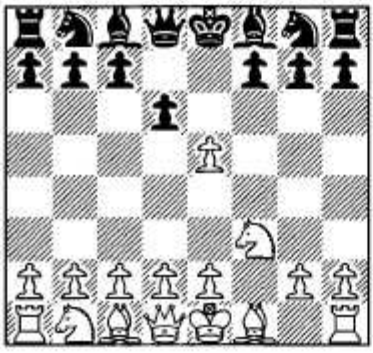
Jonsson Memorial, Reykjavik 2001

1 f4 e5 2 fxe5

A simple way to decline the gambit is the unpretentious 2 d3, but that's too quiet to make much of an impression. Bronstein, playing Black, convincingly demonstrated the harmlessness of this try in the following game: 2...exf4 3 ♗xf4 d5 4 ♘f3 ♘f6 5 ♕d2 c5 and he was already equal. V.Hort-D.Bronstein, Amsterdam 1994 continued 6 e4!? ♘c6 7 ♘c3 ♗e6 8 ♗e2 ♗e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 e5 ♘e8 11 ♖ae1 ♘c7 12 ♗d1 d4 13 ♘e4 ♘d5 14 a3 ♗f5 (14...♘xf4 15 ♕xf4 ♕c7 is a little better for Black) 15 ♖f2 ♗g6 16 g4 ♕d7 17 ♖g2 ♖ad8 18 h4 ♗xe4 19 ♖xe4 f5 ½-½ . I suppose the Grandmas-

ters didn't want to put a lot of effort in, but in fact Bronstein could play on if he wanted, e.g. 20 gxf5 (20 e6? fxe4 21 exd7 exf3 22 ♗xf3 ♘xf4 and Black has way too much for the queen) 20...♘xf4 21 ♕xf4 ♕xf5 22 ♕g4 g6 23 h5 ♕xg4 24 ♖exg4 ♖f5 25 hxg6 h6! 26 ♖e4 ♔g7 27 ♖gg4 ♖d5 28 e6 ♖f6 29 ♘h4 ♘e5 30 ♖g3 ♘xg6 and Black maintains an edge with his distant passed pawn and space on the queenside. Returning to the position after 6 e4, Black might even try taking the pawn, e.g. 6...dxe4 7 dxe4 ♘xe4 8 ♕e3 ♕e7 9 ♗xb8 ♖xb8 10 ♗b5+ ♔d8 11 0-0 ♘d6 12 ♕xc5 ♘xb5 13 ♕xb5 ♕c5+ 14 ♕xc5 ♗xc5+ with an edge for Black in the shape of the two bishops.

2...d6 3 ♘f3



White effectively declines the gambit as he does not intend to recapture on e5.

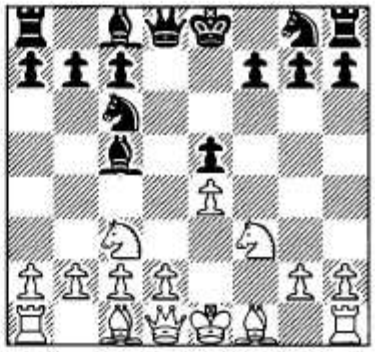
3...dxe5 4 ♘c3

4 ♘xe5 ♗d6 5 ♘f3 transposes exactly to a regular From Accepted – only the move number (5 instead of 4) is different.

4...♘c6

Also possible is 4...♘d7 (reserving the c6-square for a pawn) 5 e4 ♗c5 6 ♗c4 c6 7 d3 ♘gf6 8 ♕e2 0-0 with equality.

5 e4 ♗c5



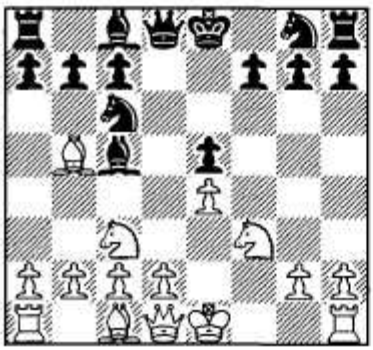
We have now reached a sort of King's Gambit Declined, but one that would almost never occur out of that opening. Consider some typical moves: 1 e4 e5 2 f4 ♗c5 3 ♘f3 d6 4 ♘c3 ♘c6 All White has to do now is play 5 fxe5 dxe5 and we get an exact transposition into the present game. But is that how White would play? The Big Database gives us 388 games with the KGD position above, and White played 5 fxe5 exactly *one* time, and lost!

Why would virtually no King's Gambit player take at this point? The answer is twofold. First, exchanging releases the pressure on Black's position and opens the d-file for his counterplay. Second (and I think more important) is that the capture gives away options – if the tension is maintained, then on every move in the future Black has to wonder if White will keep the status quo, push the f-pawn or capture and open the f-file. In other words, the capture, at this early stage, makes life easier for Black.

However, in the From Declined move order White has no other option (unless

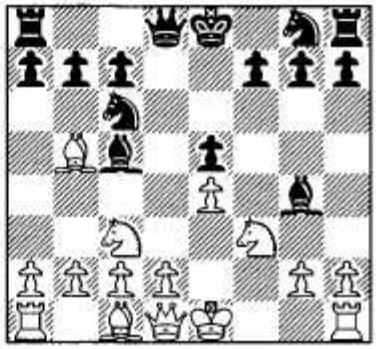
he opts for the King's Gambit on the second move, in which case he has to deal with the myriad acceptance and countergambit lines, as well as the KGD). Compare Black's easy play in this game with an actual King's Gambit. After 4..♘c6 White could continue with 5 ♗c4 ♘f6, reaching Gallagher-Giertz, Suhr 1992, by transposition. The noted English King's Gambit maestro continued 6 d3 a6 7 ♖f1 0-0 and now, seeing where Black's king lived, marked out his territory with 8 f5! and soon won thanks to a fierce attack. Obviously this is not possible with the f-pawn traded!

6 ♗b5



6...♗g4

A good move. Black wants to provoke h2-h3 to weaken White on the e1-h4 diagonal. Danielsen faced the pawn sacrifice 6...♘ge7 in another game. He snatched it with 7 ♘xe5 as otherwise White has less than nothing after, say, 7 d3 0-0. However, Black could have obtained excellent compensation with 7..♕d4 (note the open d-file) 8 ♘d3 ♗b6 with good play against the king in the centre, similar to the Rubinstein Gambit in the Four Knights. Instead of this sound play Black tried 7...0-0 and the play became wildly erratic but entertaining: 8 ♘f3 ♘d4 9 ♘a4 ♗g4 10 ♘xc5 ♗xf3 11 gxf3 ♘g6 12 c3 (12 a4! is much better for White) 12...♕h4+ 13 ♔f1 ♕h3+ 14 ♔f2 ♕h4+ 15 ♔f1 ♕h3+ 16 ♔f2 ♘xb5 (Black should take the draw; White makes his strong centre count even in the endgame!) 17 d4 ♘h4 18 ♘d3 ♕g2+ 19 ♔e3 ♘d6 20 ♘f4 ♘c4+ 21 ♔d3 ♘xb2+ 22 ♗xb2 ♕xb2 23 ♕e2 ♕a3 24 ♔c2 c5 25 d5 b5 26 ♖hb1 c4 27 ♕e3 a5 28 ♘e2 ♖ab8 29 ♘d4 b4 30 ♔d2 bxc3+ 31 ♕xc3 ♕d6 32 ♔c2 ♕xh2+ 33 ♕d2 ♕d6 34 ♖xb8 ♕xb8 35 ♖h1 ♘g6 36 ♕h2 ♕xh2+ 37 ♖xh2 ♘f4 38 ♔c3 f6 39 ♔xc4 and White's pawns eventually proved too strong in H.Danielsen-R.Pokorna, Selfoss 2003. Another beautifully messy win for the Big D!



7 h3

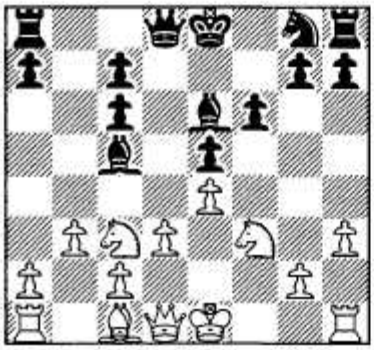
This is just what Black wants. 7 ♗xc6+ bxc6 8 h3 ♗h5 9 d3 is probably more precise, but White still has nothing real after 9...f6.

7...♗e6

While not strictly an objective mistake, the text is not the most appropriate

choice available. Black can make his life so much easier with the simple 7...♗d7, removing White's only threat (such as it is) of doubling Black's c-pawns. White can't win a pawn: 8 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 9 ♘xe5 ♕h4+ (powerful and unblockable!) 10 ♔e2 ♕f2+ 11 ♔d3 ♗xe4+! 12 ♔xe4 ♘f6+ 13 ♔d3 0-0-0+ and mates. Therefore White would have nothing better than 8 d3 ♘ge7, when Black is more than comfortable while White can't castle.

8 ♗xc6+ bxc6 9 d3 f6 10 b3



10...♘e7?

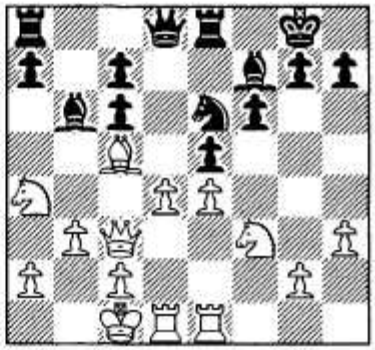
But this is a real error. Apparently Black thought White was simply intending to fianchetto his queen's bishop, and missed the manoeuvre that follows. Actually, White is trying to take over the c5-square, blockading and so weakening the doubled c-pawns. To accomplish this White needs to get his bishop to a3 or e3. The best way to meet this plan is 10...♕d6 11 ♘a4 ♗b6 and now White can't play his bishop to either of the key squares so the position is level despite Black's doubled pawns, which are compensated by the bishop pair. White can remove one of the latter, but only by connecting Black's pawns.

So this line also is fine for Black.

11 ♘a4 ♗b6 12 ♗a3

Now White has play.

12...0-0 13 ♕d2 ♖e8 14 0-0-0 ♘g6 15 ♗c5 ♗f7 16 ♖he1 ♘f8 17 ♕c3 ♘e6 18 d4!



White is better.

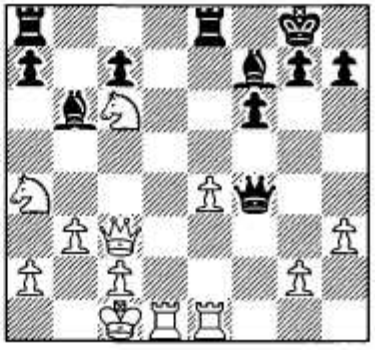
18...exd4 19 ♗xd4 ♘xd4?!

19...♕e7 20 ♕xc6 ♘xd4 21 ♘xd4 ♕e5 improves, with some compensation.

20 ♘xd4 ♕d6 21 ♘xc6

Now White is simply a pawn up.

21... ♕f4+



22 ♔b1?

Blundering back! 22 ♔b2! avoids tac-

tics on the back rank and permits White to hold the pawn, as the following disastrous variations demonstrate: 22...♖xe4 23 g3 ♖xe1 24 gxf4 ♖xd1 25 ♘xb6 axb6 26 ♕f3 ♖e1 27 ♘e7+ and wins, or 22...♗f2 23 ♖f1 ♖xe4 24 ♖d2 etc.

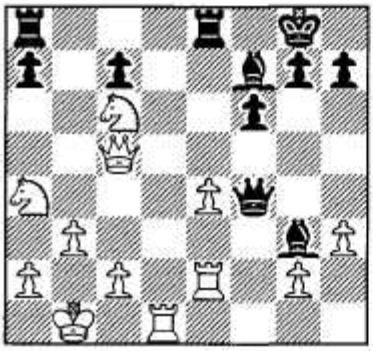
22...♗f2 23 ♖e2

The variation shown in the above note no longer works – 23 ♖f1 ♖xe4 24 ♖d2 ♖e1+! shows why the king should have gone to b2.

23...♗g3??

Apparently not believing his own good fortune, Black unbelievably fails to take his pawn back. After the obvious 23...♖xe4 Black has no problems.

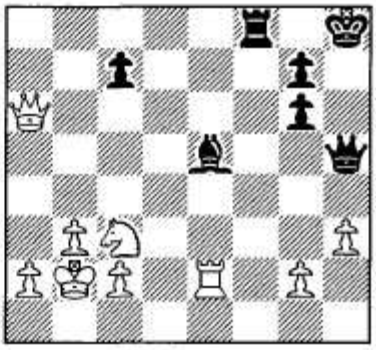
24 ♕c5!



So much for second chances! Now 24...♖xe4 fails miserably to 25 ♘e7+ ♔h8 26 ♕c6 with a mating attack, so that means Black is just a pawn down with a bad position.

24...♔h8 25 ♘c3 ♕h4 26 ♖f1 ♗g6 27 ♕d5 a6 28 e5! fxe5 29 ♘xe5 ♕h5 30 ♘xg6+ hxg6 31 ♕c6 ♖f8 32 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 33 ♕xa6 ♗e5 34 ♔b2

Fearlessly stepping into the pin since Black can't exploit it.



34...♕g5

An amusing variation is 34...♗f6 35 ♖e4 ♕c5 36 ♖c4 ♕e5 37 ♕c6 ♕c1 38 ♕xc7 ♗g5 39 b4 ♕c1+ 40 ♔b3 ♖f2 41 ♘e4 ♕b1+ 42 ♔a4 ♕xa2+ 43 ♔b5 ♖f5+ 44 ♖c5 ♕xc2 45 ♕b8+ ♔h7 46 ♘xg5+ ♖xg5 47 ♖xg5 ♕e2+ 48 ♔c6 ♕c4+ 49 ♔d6 ♕f4+ 50 ♖e5 ♕f6+ 51 ♔d7 ♕f7+ 52 ♖e7 ♕d5+ 53 ♕d6 ♕b5+ 54 ♔d8 and Black runs out of checks.

35 ♕c6 ♖f1 36 b4 ♕f4 37 a3 ♗f6 38 ♔b3

The king just waltzes away!

38...♔h7 39 ♘d5 ♖b1+ 40 ♔a4 ♕f1 41 ♘xf6+ gxf6 1-0

Black resigned without waiting for White's move. Variations such as 41...gxf6 42 ♕xc7+ ♔h6 43 ♕c4 g5 44 h4 ♖e1 45 hxg5+ ♔xg5 46 ♕d5+ ♔h6 47 ♕d2 are not encouraging!

Game 45

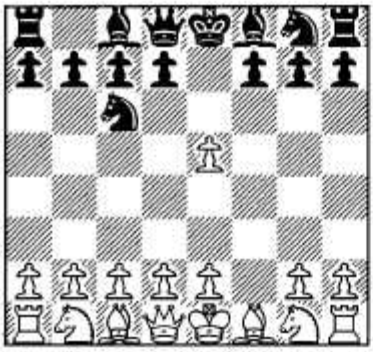
P.Auchenberg-B.Jorgensen

Denmark 1999

1 f4 e5 2 fxe5 ♘c6

Black declines his own gambit! This inconsistent move should not really pose a problem, but surprisingly often Bird

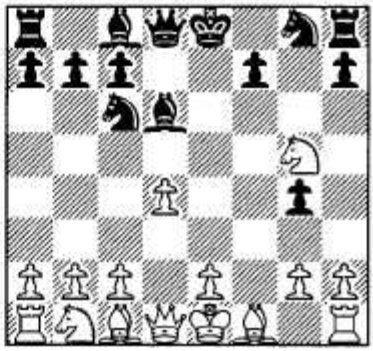
players make a mistake right here, on the third move!



3 ♘c3

White sensibly develops a piece and waits to take over the centre. So many players automatically play 3 ♘f3 here, without realizing that this is not a usual From! In fact after 3 ♘f3?! g5! Black gets an improved Lasker without even sacrificing a pawn! I find the following painful game cruelly entertaining. White continued from the above position with 4 g3 (it is obvious that he thinks he's in a regular Lasker) 4...g4 5 ♘h4 ♘xe5 (White has a knight on the edge of the board but Black has recovered his pawn with a knight in the centre!) 6 d4 ♘g6 7 ♘xg6 hxg6 (the h-file opens and White has no material compensation) 8 e4 d5 9 e5 ♗f5 10 ♗d3 ♕d7 11 ♖f1 ♖xh2 (the horror begins) 12 ♗xf5 gxf5 13 ♗f4 ♕b5 14 b3 ♗a3!! (Black plays brilliantly just to drive home the message!) 15 ♘xa3 ♕b4+ 16 ♗d2 ♕xd4 and White, bewildered, resigned in S.Multhauf-P.Leisebein, Email 2001, as lines like 17 ♕c1 ♕xe5+ 18 ♗e3 ♕xg3+ 19 ♗f2 ♕c3+ 20 ♔d1 ♕f3+ 21 ♔e1 ♔d7 are too horrible to even look at on your computer! So there you go – this position is *not* a regular Lasker!

A better alternative for White (after the mistaken 3 ♘f3 g5) is 4 d4 g4 5 ♘g5, but then Black has 5...d5, trapping the knight along the lines of Game 39. As far as I can tell this line comes out to approximate equality – here are a couple of examples after 6 exd6 ♗xd6:



a) 7 ♘e4 (sound and sensible) 7...♘xd4 8 ♘xd6+ ♕xd6 9 c3 ♘f5 10 ♕xd6 ♘xd6 11 ♗f4 ♗e6 12 ♗xd6 cxd6 13 ♘d2 ♘f6 14 e3 ♖c8 15 ♗d3 ♔e7 with equality in L.Czech-R.Christ, Giessen.

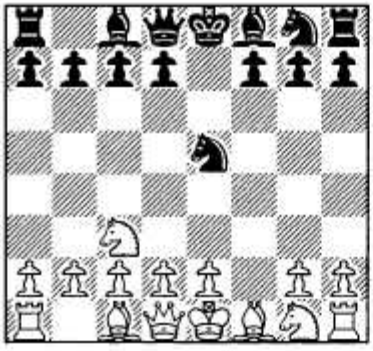
b) 7 c3 (sharp and risky) 7...f5 8 e4 h6 9 e5 and now, in reply to 9...♗e7, 10 ♘h3 is much sounder than in Game 39 because d4 is protected, e.g. 10...gxh3 11 ♕h5+ ♔f8 12 ♗c4 ♕e8 13 ♕xh3 ♕g6 14 0-0 ♗g5 15 ♗xg5 ♕xg5 16 ♘d2 ♔e8 17 d5 ♘xe5 18 ♖ae1 ♕xd2, as in P.Petran-V.Kozlov, Stary Smokovec 1976. White lost after 19 ♗b5+?, but instead 19 ♕g3 gives White a terrific and possibly winning attack. Therefore after 9 e5 Black should play 9...♕e7 10 ♘e4 ♗xe5 11 dxe5 ♕xe5 12 ♗e2 ♕xe4 13 0-0 ♗e6, when White has some com-

pensation for the pawn but probably not enough against exact play.

The main point here is that after 3 ♘f3 g5! Black has active play and should get his pawn back with a good game – so develop the other knight!

3...♘xe5

If Black changes his mind and transposes back to the regular From with 3...d6, then 4 exd6 ♗xd6 5 ♘f3 g5 6 g3 transposes to Danielsen-Stern, mentioned in the note to Black's fifth move of Taylor-Becerra, Game 35, which favours White. Black can also try 5...♗g4 but this produced no better result in P.Auchenberg-H.El Kher, Amager 1999 after 6 e3 (6 ♘b5!?) 6...♘f6 7 ♗b5 h5 8 0-0 ♕e7 9 ♕e2 0-0 10 ♗xc6 bxc6 11 ♕f2 ♖ab8 12 d3 ♖fe8 13 e4 c5 when, instead of the messy 14 e5, White could play 14 ♗g5 with a big advantage due to the pin and pressure on the f-file.



4 e4

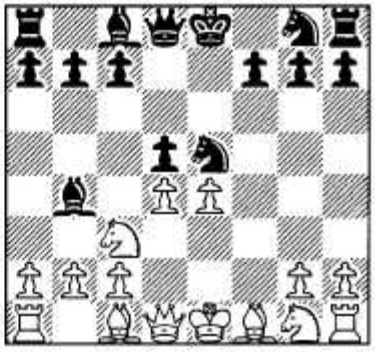
A logical and good move, but it allows some curious counterplay. I recommend the straightforward 4 d4 ♘c6 (4...♘g6 5 e4 is similar) 5 e4 ♗b4 6 ♘f3 and White has a typical classical edge reminiscent of a King's Gambit Accepted, where White has recovered his pawn and assumed control of the centre.

4...d5

Curious indeed! White can't take with the knight (5 ♘xd5?? ♕h4+) and 5 exd5 gives Black some counterplay with 5...♗c5. Hence White's next, which concentrates on staking a claim to the centre.

5 d4 ♗b4!

But Black continues his tricky play, and deserves an exclamation mark for originality!



The position is now a bizarre reversed Schliemann where White has played all the normal (Black) Schliemann moves, but Black (playing White) has not developed the king's knight! Now if White takes the knight Black has at least a draw: 6 dxe5 ♕h4+ 7 ♔e2 (7 ♔d2 d4) 7...♗xc3 8 bxc3 ♕g4+ (8...♗g4+!?) 9 ♔d2 ♕f4+ 10 ♔e2 ♕g4+ and perpetual check.

6 ♕h5

Even here the white queen is the key piece, but White selects the wrong square. 6 ♕e2! is good, e.g. 6...♗g4 (6...♘g6 7 exd5+ and Black has to make an unnatural move like 7...♔f8 or

7...♕e7, as 7...♘8e7?? loses instantly to 8 ♕b5+) 7 ♘f3 ♘xf3+ (7...♗xf3 8 gxf3 ♕h4+ 9 ♔d1 ♗xc3 10 bxc3 ♘d7 11 exd5+ and Black is in trouble) 8 gxf3 ♕h4+ 9 ♕f2 ♕xf2+ 10 ♔xf2 ♗xc3 11 bxc3 ♗e6 12 exd5 ♗xd5 13 ♖g1 g6 14 c4 ♗e6 15 ♗b2 and the bishops give White a clear plus.

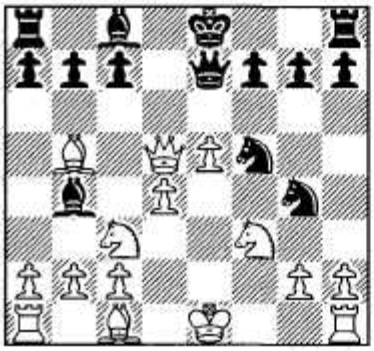
6...♘g4 7 ♕xd5 ♕e7

Black misses his chance in 7...♕xd5 8 exd5 ♘e7 9 ♗c4 ♘f6 10 ♘ge2 ♘exd5 with approximate equality.

8 e5 ♘8h6?!

8...c6 improves.

9 ♘f3 ♘f5 10 ♗b5+



10...♔f8

Now 10...c6 runs into the reply 11 ♗c6+ etc.

11 0-0

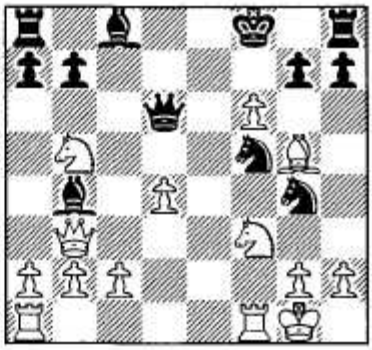
Simpler is 11 ♕e4 ♘d6 12 ♕e2 with a solid extra pawn.

11...c6 12 ♕b3 cxb5 13 ♗g5 f6 14 exf6 ♕d6?

Black can stay in the game with 14...gxf6.

15 ♘xb5

White is winning



15...♗e6 16 fxg7+ ♔xg7 17 ♘xd6 ♗xb3 18 ♘xf5+ ♔g6 19 ♘5h4+

Of course White's roving knight has caused havoc but, for some reason, after the remaining moves...

19...♔h5 20 axb3 ♗d6 21 g3 h6 22 ♗d2 ♖hg8 23 ♔g2 b5 24 ♖ae1 ♖ac8 25 ♖e6 ♖c6

...both Big Database and ChessBase.com give the final result as a draw. Was this a typo or a desperate draw offer in extreme time pressure? My guess is the former, as White's win is child's play now.

Summary

As seen in Game 44, White should avoid both branches of the From Declined as Hort's 2 d3 is too quiet and Danielsen's pseudo King's Gambit Declined also makes life too easy for the second player. If Black declines himself with 2...♘c6, as in Game 45, White should simply play 3 ♘c3 and turn his attention to the centre in straightforward classical fashion, with a simple plus. But don't automatically play 3 ♘f3, or you'll give Black a free Lasker!

PART THREE

Sicilian Defence and other Less Usual Defences

In this last part of the book we look at lines where Black does not directly challenge the Bird at all. For example, after 1 f4 c5 it looks like the players are afraid, the pawns having nothing to do with each other. Basically Black's aim in these lines is to play his own game rather than be forced into Bird lines that he may not know well. And yes, sometimes White has to meet his opponent halfway and push his e-pawn, for example, in order to strive for an advantage.

The crucial point is that these non-challenging moves allow White to immediately seize the centre if he so wishes – and that's more important than whether you call the opening a Bird or a Sicilian! Chapter 10 deals only with 1...c5, and I give a recipe of my own – well, I borrowed it from Larsen! – that will enable the reader to fill out his repertoire without venturing too deep into the Sicilian jungle. Chapter 11 covers all the remaining moves, of which the most important is the blunt blockade 1...f5.

CHAPTER TEN

Black adopts a Sicilian Set-Up

After 1...d5 and 1...e5 the next most common defence to the Bird is 1...c5. As everyone knows there are many die-hard Sicilian players out there and, to put it bluntly, they don't want to play *your* opening – they want to play *their* opening! This immediately creates a condition of psychological warfare. After all, one of the great advantages of the Bird is that on the first move Black is forced to defend against White's specific opening choice. But the Sicilian fan tends not to be too compromising. I alluded to this in Chapter 6 (the Stonewall) in which I mentioned that I sometimes played the Stonewall against Sicilian systems in order to force Black into a Bird line rather than allow him to stay in his comfort zone. However, I also pointed out in that chapter that the Stonewall gives White no objective advantage.

So how should White handle 1 f4 c5? First, let me point out the very important lesson that I learned, which is illustrated in Game 49 and in Taylor-Matikozyan (presented in the notes therein): White continues with typical Bird moves against the Sicilian, for example 1 f4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 e3 ♘f6 4 ♗e2 etc. White gets *no advantage* out of the opening. This is not necessarily a bad thing – such variations are perfectly playable, and if you want to give your opponent an unusual position where he has to think with his own head, then this quiet play may be the way to go. However, if you choose this kind of line do not under any circumstances try to force the play, as White's position is not sufficiently active do so. And if you switch to attack later, you will need to push the e-pawn, in which case you will have lost a vital tempo – the above mentioned Taylor-Matikozyan is a drastic example of the cost of this tempo loss.

While such quiet play may be fine for a change, I don't think the Bird player can be satisfied with this. I play the Bird to win. And we want to get some kind of opening advantage with White. So I will give it to you straight: to seriously play for an opening advantage against 1...c5

you have to play an early e2-e4. Now you might ask if this means needing to learn the Grand Prix Attack, with thousands of games in the database in the main line alone (which could be reached, via the Bird order, by 1 f4 c5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e4 ♗g7 4 ♘c3 ♘c6 5 ♗b5, for examples). In fact buying another book is not necessary as there is another way to play. If you're wondering whether this is the Closed Sicilian (reached via the Bird via 1 f4 c5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e4 ♗g7 4 d3 ♘c6 5 g3 d6 6 ♗g2 e6 7 0-0 ♘ge7 8 ♘c3) with all those Spassky games from the sixties, then again the answer is no. Instead I recommend what the great Bird warrior Bent Larsen has consistently played at the highest level, the hitherto unexplored, 'unbooked' system with ♗e2! The basic move order (this is Larsen-Fischer) is 1 f4 c5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e4 ♗g7 4 ♗e2. This modest move has several advantages. Essentially White is playing a Classical Dutch reversed where the pawn has reached e4 in one go. If Black at some point pushes to d5, then White has two extra moves since he didn't have to play e2-e3 first, as in Chapter One. A drastic example of tempo punishment can be seen in Game 48.

However, it is more likely that Black will continue in Sicilian style (with ...d7-d6), but then this means that White is playing a sharp system against the English (1 c4 e5 2 g3 f5 3 ♗g2 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 ♗e7) with reversed colours and an extra tempo. White can play for a kingside attack with f4-f5 (Game 46) or build up a central territorial advantage with c2-c3 and d3-d4 (Game 47).

So you don't have to buy another book! Unless, that is, this line is quickly taken up by GMs everywhere, christened the 'Flea Circus Variation' or some other highly appropriate name, and new lines start bubbling out of the Internet on an hourly basis... But until that time, this little book will give you a complete Bird repertoire!

Now let's send some Sicilians to sleep with the fishes!

Game 46

B.Larsen-F.Olafsson

Reykjavik 1995

Before we begin the analysis of this game let me give a few examples of alternative methods of play which are outside the scope of this book (and have, indeed, whole books written about them already). A couple of varieties of Closed Sicilian are possible: Danielsen likes a pawn on c3 rather than a knight. Bareev likes the classical ♘c3 development, as played many times by Spassky. In both cases note that Black puts a stop to White's kingside attack with a properly timed ...f7-f5.

Let's take a look:

H.Danielsen-I.Johannesson, Selfoss 2003 went 1 f4 g6 2 g3 ♗g7 3 ♗g2 c5 4 d3 ♘c6 5 ♘h3 d6 6 c3 e6 7 0-0 ♘ge7 8 a4 0-0 9 e4 f5 (Black equalizes with this well timed block) 10 ♘a3 b6 11 exf5 exf5 12 ♖e1 d5 13 ♗d2 h6 14 ♕b3 ♕d7 15 ♖e2 ♗a6 16 ♘f2 ♖ad8 17 ♖ae1 ♔h7 18 ♕a2 ♘g8 19 ♘b5 ♖f7 20 ♖e6 ♖f6 21 ♗xd5? (a risky attempt to win, but better is 21 ♖6e2, with equality) 21...♕xd5 22 ♕xd5 ♖xd5 23 ♘c7 ♖xd3 24 ♘xd3 ♗xd3 25 ♘d5 ♖xe6 26 ♖xe6 ♘a5 27 ♖d6 ♘c4 28

♖d7 and now (instead of 28...♗e4) 28...♘xd2 29 ♘c7 ♘f3+ 30 ♔f2 ♘f6 31 ♖xd3 ♘xh2 should win for Black.

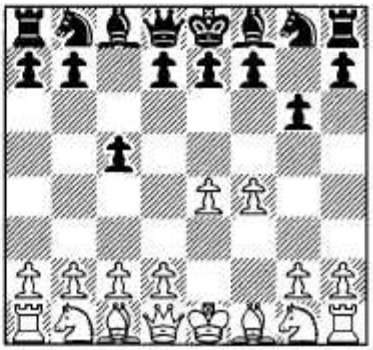
E.Bareev-P.Leko, Monaco 2004 was a blindfold game, but the classical Closed Sicilian is so worked out these days that neither player made any headway – 1 g3 c5 2 ♗g2 g6 3 e4 ♗g7 4 f4 ♘c6 5 d3 d6 6 ♘f3 e6 7 ♘c3 ♘ge7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♗e3 b6 10 ♕d2 ♘d4 11 ♖ae1 ♗b7 12 ♗f2 ♕d7 13 ♘h4 f5 (the standard block) 14 ♘d1 fxe4 15 ♗xe4 ♘ef5 16 ♘xf5 exf5 17 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 18 ♗xd4 ♗xd4+ 19 ♘e3 ♕f7 20 a3 d5 (Black might have been able to take the b-pawn here, though not on the previous move – but this is difficult to find) 21 c3 ♗g7 22 ♘c2 ♖fe8 23 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 ½-½.

White can also try the currently very popular Grand Prix Attack. D.Campora-A.Khalifman, New York 1998 saw 1 e4 c5 2 f4 g6 3 ♘f3 ♗g7 4 ♘c3 ♘c6 5 ♗b5 ♘d4 6 a4 a6 7 ♗d3 e6 8 ♘xd4 cxd4 9 ♘e2 ♘e7 10 b4 d6 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♔h1 f5 13 c3 dxc3 14 dxc3 ♔h8 15 ♗e3 e5 16 ♕e1 ♗e6 17 ♖d1 ♕c7 18 a5 ♕c6 19 fxe5 dxe5 20 ♗c5 fxe4 21 ♖xf8+ ♗xf8 22 ♗c2 ♘f5 23 ♗xf8 ♖xf8 24 ♘g3 ♗d5 25 ♔g1 ♘xg3 26 ♕xg3 ♕f6 27 h3 ♗c6 28 ♕e3 ♕f4 ½-½. Perhaps unhappy with this bookish draw, the next year GM Campora tried the infrequently played ♗e2 variation, and won (Game 47).

And now we can turn to Larsen-Olafsson.

1 e4 c5 2 f4 g6

Thanks to White's move order Black has the opportunity to play the sound gambit 2...d5 3 exd5 ♘f6, which seems to equalize. Therefore I recommend the Bird order 1 f4 c5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e4, when 3...d5 does not work (see the next note).

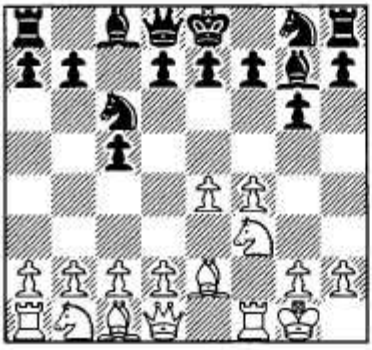


3 ♘f3 ♗g7

3...d5?! 4 exd5 ♕xd5 (the gambit now fails after 4...♘f6 5 ♗b5+ ♗d7 6 ♗d7+ ♕d7 7 c4 as the normal break 7...e6 is both inconsistent with 2...g6 and also has tactical problems due to 8 ♘e5) 5 ♘c3 ♕e6+ 6 ♗e2 (6 ♘e5 ♘h6 7 ♗c4 is also much better for White) 6...♗g7 7 d4 (White has a significant development advantage and will get still more mileage out of Black's queen) 7...♘f6 8 0-0 ♘bd7 9 ♘b5 ♕b6 10 ♗e3 a6 11 dxc5 ♕d8 12 ♘c3 0-0 13 ♘e5 ♕c7? (13...♘xe5 14 fxe5 ♕xd1 15 ♖axd1 ♘g4 16 ♗f4 is the lesser evil, when White is better but Black is still playing) 14 ♘d3 (White is winning) 14...b6 15 ♗f3 ♖b8 16 c6 ♘c5 17 b4 ♘xd3 18 cxd3 ♘g4 19 ♗d2! ♗d4+ 20 ♔h1 ♘f2+ 21 ♖xf2 ♗xf2 22 ♕e2 ♗d4 23 ♘d5 ♕d6 24 c7! (White finishes with a tactical flourish) 24...♗xa1 25 ♕xe7!! 1-0, T.Taylor-T.Kurosaki, LA Masters (rapidplay) 2005.

4 ♗e2 ♘c6 5 0-0

This is the basic position of this variation. White has a conventional slight edge consisting of rapid development and castling plus the strong pawn duo in the centre.



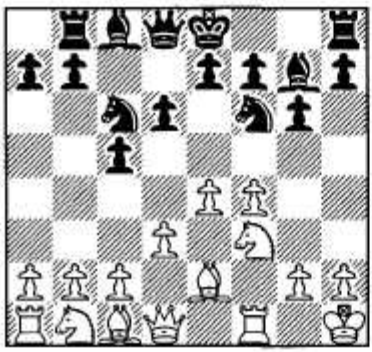
5...d6

Keres tried 5...e6 against Larsen at Zurich in 1961. After 6 d3 ♘ge7 7 c3 0-0 8 ♗e3 b6 9 ♘bd2 Black equalized with the standard 9...f5 and the game was eventually drawn. However, Larsen should have struck faster with 9 d4!, e.g. 9...f5 10 e5 ♘d5 11 ♕d2 d6 12 ♘a3 ♘e3 13 ♕e3 dxe5 14 dxe5 ♘e7 15 ♘c4 ♘d5 16 ♕d2 ♗a6 17 g3 and White is clearly better. Notice how White's centre completely bottles up the g7-bishop.

6 d3

White opts for 6 c3 in Game 47.

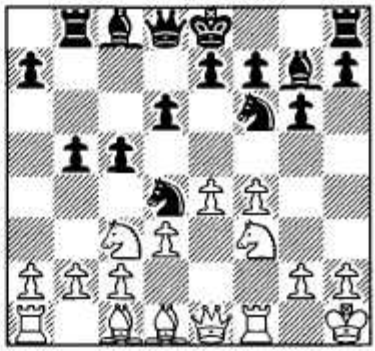
6...♘f6 7 ♔h1 ♖b8



8 ♘c3

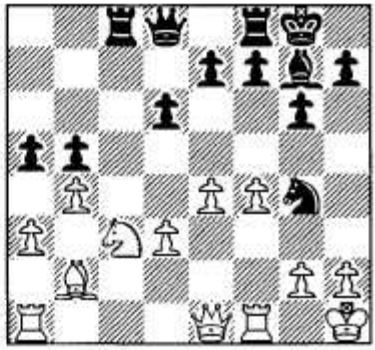
With the b-pawn about to rush forward I would prefer 8 c3 b5 9 ♘bd2 with an edge for White.

8...b5 9 ♕e1 ♘d4 10 ♗d1



In fact Larsen has everything under control and coordinates neatly with a manoeuvre known from the Classical Dutch.

10...0-0 11 ♘xd4 cxd4 12 ♘e2 ♘g4 13 c3 dxc3 14 ♘xc3 ♘f6 15 a3 a5 16 b4 ♗g4 17 ♗xg4 ♘xg4 18 ♗b2 ♖c8

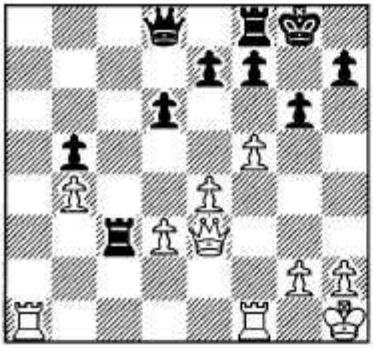


19 ♕d2

Also possible is 19 bxa5!? ♕xa5 20 ♘d5 ♕xe1 21 ♘xe7+ ♔h8 22 ♗xg7+ ♔xg7 23 ♖axe1 ♖c3 24 h3 when Black gets his pawn back but White maintains a slight endgame advantage due to his

better pawn structure. However, Larsen is aiming at the king and so is not interested in an early endgame!

19...axb4 20 axb4 ♘e3 21 ♕xe3 ♗xc3 22 ♗xc3 ♖xc3 23 f5!



How many times have we seen this move in this book? The typical Bird blow strikes again! White is better, but Black has a resource which must be respected...

23...♕c7 24 h4?

...Except that both players miss it! 24 ♖fe1 protects the queen and allows White to maintain the lead and continue the attack.

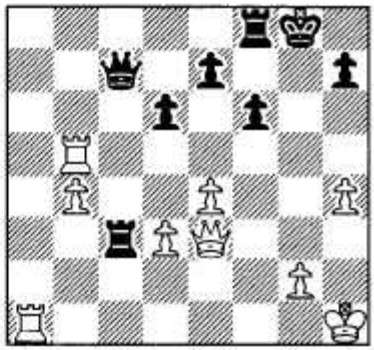
24...gxf5??

Panic! Black exposes his own king and – worse – completely misses the pretty save with 24...♕c4!, when Black is even a little better, e.g. 25 ♖ad1 ♕xb4 26 h5 ♕c5 27 ♕h6 ♕d4 28 hxg6 hxg6 29 fxg6 ♕g7 30 gxf7+ ♖xf7 31 ♕e6 ♖c2 and both Black's passed pawn and his attack are more dangerous than White's.

25 ♖xf5??

Back to back blunders. Black can survive after this, which would certainly not be the case after the forcing 25 ♖a7! ♕d8 26 ♕g5+ ♔h8 27 ♖xe7 etc.

25...f6 26 ♖xb5



26...♖c8

Once again 26...♕c4! works. It can be difficult to override your automatic pilot that tells you not to move your queen to a square defended by a pawn, but here that so-called defence is illusory and, furthermore, in a desperate position all moves should be considered! After 26...♕c4 the best I see is 27 ♕g3+ ♔f7 (not 27...♔h8? 28 dxc4 ♖xg3 29 ♖b7 and White wins) 28 dxc4 ♖xg3 29 ♖h5 ♔g6 30 ♖d5 and White has a tough ending to win, with the black rook active behind the weak pawns.

27 ♖a7!

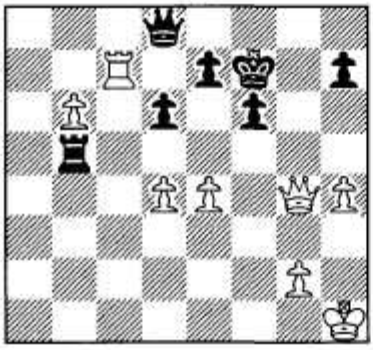
White sees the key idea – attack the seventh rank – that he missed before. Olafsson gets no more chances.

27...♕d8

27...♕c4 is too late now because 28 dxc4 ♖xe3 29 ♖xe7 wins easily thanks to the absolute seventh.

28 ♖bb7 ♖3c7 29 b5 ♖xb7 30 ♖xb7 ♔f7 31 b6 ♖c2 32 ♕h6 ♔g8 33 ♕h5 ♖c5 34 ♕g4+ ♔f7 35 d4 ♖b5 36 ♖c7!

A nice finish. White switches his attack from the seventh rank to the eighth.



36...h5

36...♖xb6 37 ♖c8 is decisive (note the mating focal point at g8).

37 ♕e2 ♖a5

The pawn is still immune – 37...♖xb6 38 ♕xh5+ ♔g7 39 ♕g4+ ♔h6 (or 39...♔h7 40 ♖c8 ♖b1+ 41 ♔h2 ♕b6 42 ♕h5+ ♔g7 43 ♕h8+ ♔g6 44 ♖g8+ ♔f7 45 ♖g7+ ♔e6 46 ♕c8 mate) 40 ♖c8 wins the queen.

38 d5 ♕h8 39 b7 ♖a1+ 40 ♔h2 ♖b1 41 ♖c8 1-0

I have to admit I enjoyed watching these two world famous GMs blunder back and forth for a minute (moves 24-26). This makes me feel slightly better about my own often extremely dubious decisions! But the game as a whole is a good example of White's attacking chances, and we should make a special note of the powerful f4-f5 break once again.

Game 47

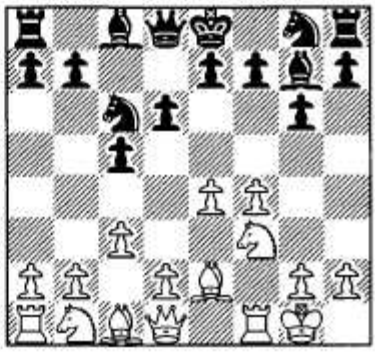
D.Campora-I.Herrera

Malaga 1999

1 e4 c5 2 f4 g6 3 ♘f3 ♗g7 4 ♗e2 ♘c6

Of course the Bird order would be 1 f4 c5 2 ♘f3 g6 3 e4 ♗g7 4 ♗e2 ♘c6.

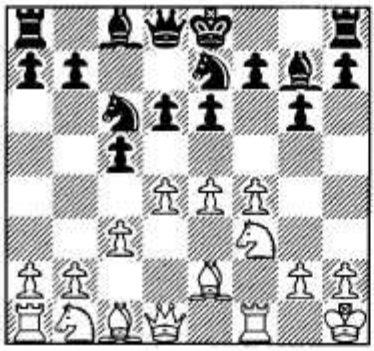
5 0-0 d6 6 c3



The famous 6th game of the Larsen-Fischer Candidates match, Denver 1971 continued 6 d3 e6 7 ♘a3 ♘ge7 8 c3 0-0 9 ♗e3 a6 10 d4 cxd4 11 ♘xd4 (rather than transpose to an open Sicilian I believe White has slightly better chances with 11 cxd4, maintaining a solid space advantage) 11...b5 12 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 13 ♕d2 ♕c7 14 ♖ad1 ♖d8 15 ♘c2 ♖b8 16 a3 ♘a5 17 e5 ♗f8 18 b4 ♘c6 19 ♘d4 dxe5 20 fxe5 ♘xe5 21 ♗g5 ♖d5 22 ♕f4 ♗g7 23 h4 ♖b7 24 ♗f6 ♗xf6 25 ♕xf6 ♕xc3 26 h5 gxh5 (White's attack is good enough to draw, but no more – yet one understands that after five successive losses Bent was desperate to win) 27 ♔h1 (simplest is 27 ♘xe6 ♗xe6 28 ♖xd5 ♗xd5 29 ♕d8+ ♔g7 30 ♕f6+ with a draw by perpetual check) 27...♘g4 28 ♗xg4 hxg4 29 ♕h6 ♗d7 30 ♖f4 f5 31 ♕f6 (31 ♕g5+ still draws after 31...♔f7 32 ♕h5+ ♔g8 and so on as Black can't deviate with 32...♔e7 due to 33 ♕g5+ ♔d6 34 ♕f6 ♕xa3 35 ♖ff1 with a winning attack) 31...♗c8 (now that the rook on b7 is included in the

defence, White is lost) 32 ♖ff1 ♖f7 33 ♕h6 ♗b7 34 ♘xe6 ♕f6 35 ♕e3 ♖e7 36 ♖de1 ♖d6 37 ♕g5+ ♕xg5 38 ♘xg5 ♖xe1 39 ♖xe1 ♗d5 40 ♖e8+ ♔g7 0-1.

6...e6 7 ♔h1 ♘ge7 8 d4



White's direct play is enough for a plus. Notice how White has saved a tempo on Larsen-Fischer, above, by making this advance in one move, omitting d2-d3. Another advantage is that White has not committed his queen's knight. While Black's first seven moves are identical to Fischer's, White is not exactly following Larsen. For example, Larsen put the knight on a3, where it took a while to get into the game, whereas here Campora soon sends the caballo to the more central c3-square.

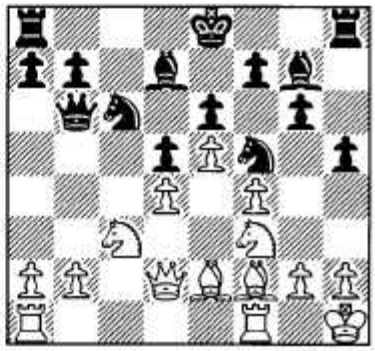
8...cxd4 9 cxd4 d5

I don't like this because White simply locks the centre and Black is permanently cramped. Black has more play with 9...0-0 10 ♘c3 a6 11 ♗e3, although White's space advantage is still a factor.

10 e5 h5

Or 10...♘f5 11 ♘c3 ♕b6 12 g4 ♘fe7 (12...♘fxd4? 13 ♗e3) 13 ♘b5 and the d6-square beckons.

11 ♗e3 ♘f5 12 ♗f2 ♕b6 13 ♕d2 ♗d7 14 ♘c3

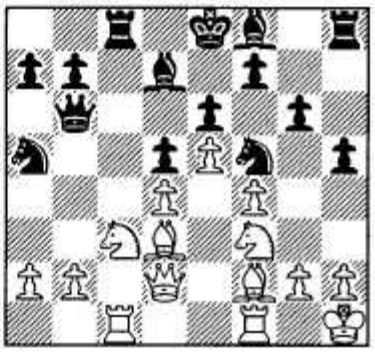


White has consolidated his spatial plus and stands better.

14...♘a5 15 ♗d3 ♗f8

Black can't advance with 15...♘c4? in view of 16 ♗xc4 dxc4 17 d5 and White breaks through in the centre.

16 ♖ac1 ♖c8



17 ♗xf5?

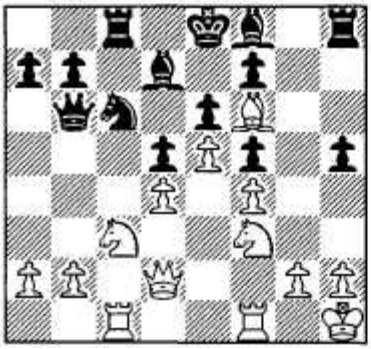
There is no reason to part with the good bishop. White should play the simple tactic 17 ♘a4!, when the knight is immune due to the hanging rook on c8. White's positional advantage increases after 17...♕b4 18 ♖xc8+ ♗xc8 19 ♕c2 ♗d7 20 ♘c5, with further gain of territory and, meanwhile, still no counterplay

for Black.

17...gxf5 18 ♗h4 ♘c6?

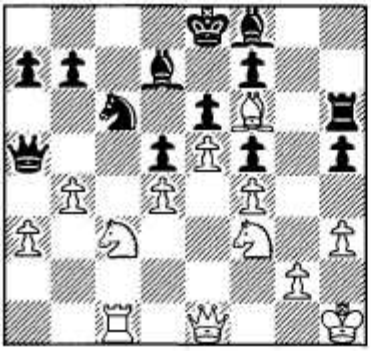
This is an unmotivated retreat that returns the lead to White. Instead Black has 18...♘c4, exploiting White's missing bishop and snaring a pawn, which will compensate for Black's somewhat precarious position.

19 ♗f6



Now Black has a bad game and no extra material!

19...♖h6 20 ♖fe1 ♘e7 21 ♘e2 ♖xc1 22 ♖xc1 ♘c6 23 ♘c3 ♕a6 24 h3 ♘b4 25 a3 ♘c6 26 ♕e1 ♕a5 27 b4!



27...♕b6 1-0

Black probably resigned because he couldn't stand his position any more! Note that Black couldn't have played 27...♕xa3 as White has 28 ♘b5, threatening mate and the queen. Black can only prolong the game by giving up a piece with 28...♗xb4 29 ♘xa3 ♗xe1 30 ♖xe1 and White wins in good time. After the text White can simply continue the big clamp with 28 ♕f2 and a huge plus. Black can barely move but White has threats on both sides, namely b4-b5 and ♘a4-c5 on the queenside or, on the other flank, ♕g3 once the light pressure on d4 is thwarted.

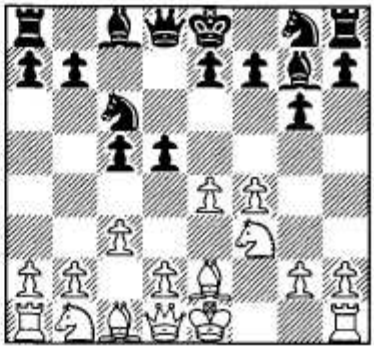
I like White's direct play for the space advantage in this game. Note particularly the tempo-saving c2-c3 and d2-d4 compared to the Larsen-Fischer game in the notes.

Game 48

S.Drazic-G.Fabiano

Catania 1990

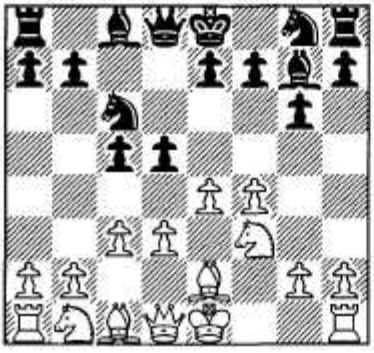
1 f4 g6 2 ♘f3 ♗g7 3 e4 c5 4 ♗e2 ♘c6 5 c3 d5?!



As I mentioned in the introduction, I can't recommend this move as now Black is playing a reversed Classical Dutch position a couple of moves down.

The only way to try to justify the move is to exchange queens and try to draw the ending, as seen in the next note – but as I have many times pointed out, the e4/f4 duo in this structure favours White, and Black had a real struggle even though he finally made the draw.

6 d3



6...♘f6

Here's that tough ending (in full): 6...dxe4 7 dxe4 ♕xd1+ 8 ♗xd1 ♘f6 9 ♗c2 0-0 10 0-0 b6 11 e5 ♘d5 12 ♗e4 e6 13 ♖d1 ♘de7 14 ♘a3 ♗b7 15 ♖d7 ♖ab8 16 ♗e3 ♖fd8 17 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 18 ♖ad1 h6 19 ♘b5 a6 20 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 21 ♖xd8+ ♘xd8 22 ♘d6 ♗d5 23 ♘d2 ♗f8 24 c4 ♗c6 25 ♘2e4 ♔g7 26 b4 cxb4 27 ♗xb6 ♗xe4 28 ♗xd8 ♗xd6 29 exd6 ♗c6 30 ♔f2 f6 31 ♗a5 e5 32 g3 ♔f7 33 ♗xb4 ♔e6 34 ♔e3 ♔f5 35 fxe5 fxe5 36 h3 h5 37 h4 ♔g4 38 ♗c3 ♔f5 39 ♗b4 ½-½, K.Bjerring-R.Enjuto Velasco, Linares 2003.

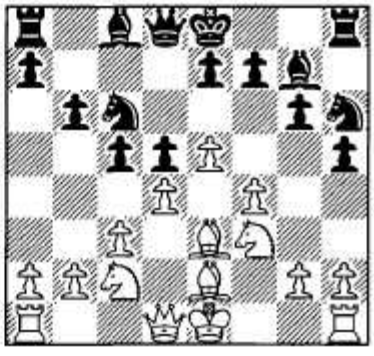
I'm not sure where (or if) there was a knockout for White, but I would be happy to take the position after the queen trade and see if I could find something! As for Black, suffering throughout and saving a draw a pawn down is not to everyone's taste, but this is certainly better than the main game, nevertheless!

Another try for Black is 6...e6, which reminds me of my game with Shabalov (Game 9), but here White shows a much better plan of attack: slow, well prepared, overwhelming. E.Bhend-P.Loetscher, Baden 1998 went 7 0-0 ♘ge7 8 ♘a3 0-0 9 ♕e1 ♖b8 10 ♘c2 b6 11 e5 h6 12 d4 c4 13 g4 ♗d7 14 ♗d2 b5 15 ♔h1 a5 16 ♖g1 ♔h7 17 ♖g3 ♘g8 18 ♖h3 f5 19 gxf5 gxf5 20 ♕g3 ♕e7 21 ♖g1 (note White's methodical play, which is quite a contrast to my hurry against Shabalov!) 21...♔h8 22 a3 ♖b7 23 ♗e1 ♖fb8 24 ♕g2 ♕f8 25 ♗h4 ♗e8 26 ♗e1 ♗f7 27 ♘g5 ♘ge7 28 ♘xf7+ ♕xf7 29 ♗h5 ♕f8 30 ♖g3 ♘g8 31 ♖g6 b4 32 axb4 axb4 33 cxb4 ♘d8 34 b5 and Black resigned as the threat of 35 ♗b4 was deadly.

7 e5

With two extra moves compared with the similar Dutch position there is no reason to hold back!

7...♘g8 8 ♘a3 h5 9 ♘c2 ♘h6 10 ♗e3 b6 11 d4



The typical big clamp. White has a clear advantage.

11...c4

This gives White a free hand, but if Black opens lines with 11...cxd4 12 ♘fxd4 ♘xd4 13 ♘xd4 his king will be very shaky no matter where he seeks shelter.

12 ♗f2 ♗f5 13 ♘e3 e6 14 ♗h4 ♕b8 15 h3 ♗e4 16 ♘g5!

Beautiful! White uses his time advantage to deadly effect, rendering Black virtually helpless because lines are opening no matter what he plays.

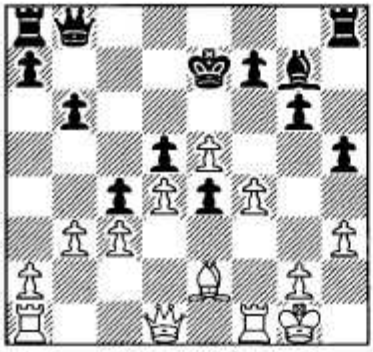
16...♘f5 17 ♘xf5 exf5

17...♗xf5 18 g4 sees White win at least a pawn.

18 ♘xe4 fxe4 19 0-0

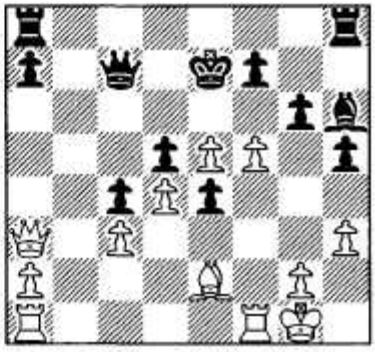
White gears up for the f4-f5 break!

19...♘e7 20 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 21 b3!!



This is even stronger than the immediate 21 f5. Now White opens a second front on the other side of the board, and this is just too much for Black, whose fragile position collapses.

21...b5 22 bxc4 bxc4 23 f5! ♗h6 24 ♕a4 ♕c7 25 ♕a3+

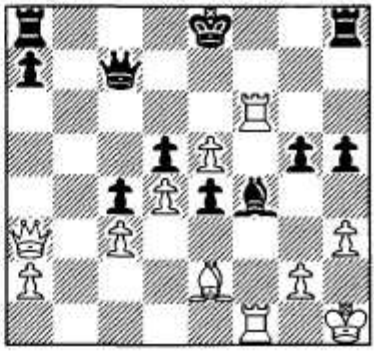


The two pronged attack is decisive.

25...♔e8 26 fxg6 fxg6 27 ♖f6 ♗e3+ 28 ♔h1 g5

Or 28...♖g8 29 ♕a6, when White infiltrates decisively.

29 ♖af1 ♗f4



30 ♗xh5+! 1-0

A great attacking game! After 30...♖xh5 White forces mate with 31 ♕f8+ ♔d7 32 ♕f7+ ♔c8 (32...♔d8 33

♕g8+ ♔d7 34 ♕c6+ ♔d8 35 ♖f8 mate) 33 ♕e8+ ♔b7 34 ♖b1+ ♕b6 35 ♖f7+ ♔a6 36 ♕a4+ ♕a5 37 ♖f6 mate.

Time is important in the opening! Even when fighting one of Black's openings (reversed) it can't be good to give away two whole moves, as Black did when he played 5...d5. If Black wants to fight the reversed Dutch systems he should play ...d7-d5 on the very first move in order to hinder White's thematic thrust of the e-pawn.

Game 49

T.Taylor-R.Vasquez

HB Global, Minneapolis 2005

1 f4

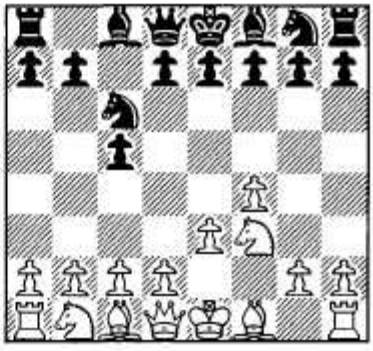
In this game White plays a strict Bird versus the Sicilian, but as I pointed out in the introduction, White has no real chance of an opening advantage using this method. However, unusual positions arise which require that both players think on their own. The Bird player, familiar with the ideas, might have at least some psychological advantage here!

1...c5

Before we go any further it is my duty to present one of my most painful Bird losses! T.Taylor-A.Matikozian, American Open, Los Angeles 2004 went 1 f4 g6 2 ♘f3 ♗g7 3 e3 c5 4 ♗e2 b6 5 0-0 ♗b7 6 a4 a6 7 ♘a3 d6 8 d3 ♘d7 9 c3 (this looks like a position that could have come out of the last three games, with the major difference being that there White's e-pawn was already at e4) 9...♘gf6 10 ♗d2 0-0 (White could now continue unpretentiously with 11 ♘c2 for an equal game, but I try to attack and lose a critical tempo with the e-pawn) 11 e4 ♕c7 12 ♕e1 ♗c6 13 ♕h4 b5 14 f5 c4 15 axb5 cxd3 16 ♗xd3 axb5 17 fxg6 hxg6 18 ♘g5 ♖fb8 19 ♗b1 ♘e5 20 ♗a2 ♗e8! 21 ♗c3 b4 22 cxb4 ♖xb4 23 ♘b1 ♕d8 24 ♘c3 ♖xb2 25 ♗d4 ♖d2 26 ♖ad1 ♖xd4 27 ♖xd4 ♕b6 28 ♕f2 ♘eg4 29 ♗xf7+ ♗xf7 30 ♘d5 ♗xd5 0-1. That was pretty drastic! I haven't tried to attack when a tempo down since then. Incidentally, if White were a tempo ahead after 20 ♗a2 and could have an extra move (before ...♗e8), then there is 21 ♖f6!! exf6 (21...♗xf6 22 ♗xf7+) 22 ♗xf7+ ♘xf7 23 ♕h7+ ♔f8 24 ♘e6+ etc. As it was, because of the missing tempo it was *Black* to move, and he ended White's dreams with accurate defence.

You will notice my play against Vasquez is circumspect, quiet to a fault, as the game stays equal for a long time ...

2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 e3

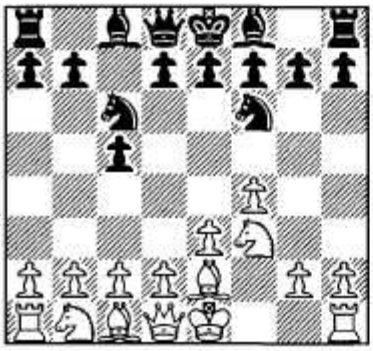


If one wants to strive for an opening advantage, then play 3 e4 here. The text allows Black equality, and defers the battle to the middlegame.

3...♘f6 4 ♗e2

White can transpose to Chapter 6 with 4 d4, when Black's best is 4...d5 with a

Stonewall.

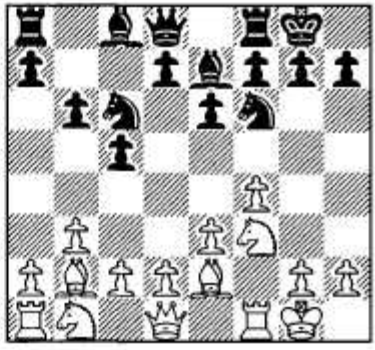


4...e6 5 b3 ♗e7 6 ♗b2 b6 7 0-0

Since White has now castled, but Black has not, it's possible to envision counterplay involving a bishop on b7, a rook on g8, and a focal point on g2. Take a look at the following game from Berescu, the From slaying hero of Game 38, where for a minute Black had very dangerous counterplay with that plan in an analogous position. The game went like this: 1 f4 b6 2 ♘f3 ♗b7 3 e3 ♘f6 4 b3 e6 5 ♗b2 ♗e7 6 ♗e2 c5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 ♘e5 ♕c7 9 ♗f3 ♖g8 10 ♕e2 d5 11 d3 (11 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 12 ♗e5 ♕b7 13 c4 is preferable) 11...g5 12 ♘d2 ♘xe5? 13 fxe5 ♘d7 14 ♗h5 (Berescu takes command) 14...♖g7 15 ♗xf7+ ♖xf7 16 ♕h5 ♘xe5 17 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 18 ♕xf7+ ♔d7 19 ♘f3 ♕xe3+ 20 ♔h1 ♖f8 21 ♕g7 ♖f6 22 ♖ae1 ♕f4 23 d4 cxd4 24 g3 ♕xf3+ 25 ♖xf3 ♖xf3 26 ♕g8 ♖e3 27 ♖d1 ♖e2 28 ♕b8 ♗c6 29 ♕xa7+ ♔d6 30 ♕xb6 ♖xc2 31 b4 ♔e5 32 ♕c7+ 1-0, A.Berescu-E.Ambrus, Baile Tusnad 1999. Instead of his unfortunate 12th move Black could have played 12...gxf4!, e.g. 13 ♘xc6 (13 exf4 ♘d4 14 ♕d1 ♘xf3+ 15 ♕xf3 d4 16 ♘e4 ♘d5 favours Black, who has the bishop pair and chances to exploit the hole on e3) 13...♗xc6 14 exf4 ♕xf4 15 ♗xd5 ♘xd5 16 ♖xf4 ♘xf4 17 ♕e5 ♖xg2+ 18 ♔f1 ♖xd2 19 ♕xf4 ♖xc2 20 ♗e5 ♖d8 and the rook, bishop and attack combine to be worth more than White's queen.

If Black is hell bent on winning, this very double-edged line might be worth another try.

7...0-0



But on this Western front, all remains quiet!

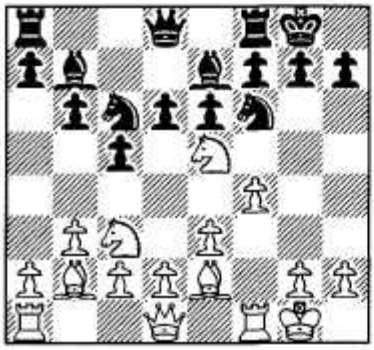
8 ♘c3

The knight is a little awkward here, but it has to come out somewhere! One advantage of Black holding his centre pawns back is that White has no concrete outposts for his knights. 8 d3 is inadvisable here because after 8...♗b7 9 ♘bd2 ♘g4 White has problems with e3.

8...♗b7

8...d6!? prevents ♘e5 and brings about a situation in which a Hedgehog battles it out with a Bird! With the Bird flying high and the Hedgehog crouching low, it doesn't look like either side can land a blow, so let's call it even!

9 ♘e5 d6

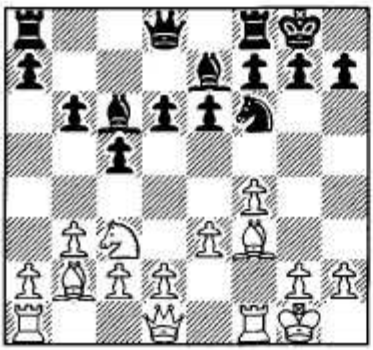


Also possible is 9...d5 with a balanced Queen's Fianchetto, as in Chapter 2.

10 ♘xc6

White plays carefully. The alternative 10 ♗a6!? can lead to very sharp play if Black so wishes, e.g. 10...♗xa6 11 ♘xc6 ♕d7 12 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 13 ♖f3 ♗b7 14 ♖g3 d5 15 d3 c5!? 16 fxe5 ♕xe5 17 ♘a4 d4 18 exd4 cxd4 19 ♕c1 ♕d6 20 ♕c1 ♘h5! 21 ♖g4 f5 22 ♖xd4 ♕g6 23 ♕f1 f4 and Black has a good attack for the pawn. Black can keep it quiet with 10...♕c8!? 11 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 12 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 and the usual equality.

10...♗xc6 11 ♗f3

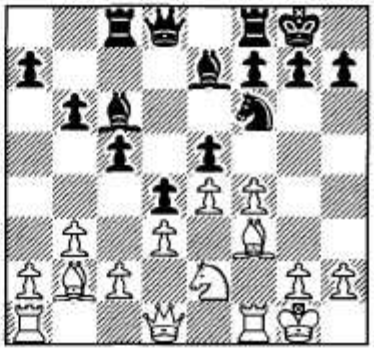


11...d5

11...♗xf3 12 ♕xf3 (12 ♖xf3 ♘d7 is similar) 12...♘d7 looks logical, when Black intends ...♗f6 with a level game.

12 d3 ♖c8 13 e4 d4 14 ♘e2 e5?

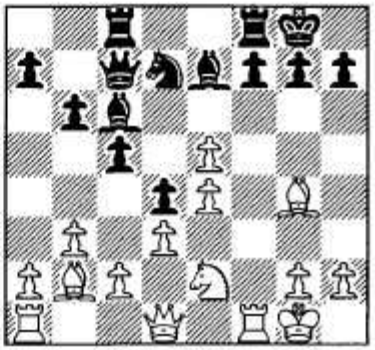
Black can still keep it even with 14...♘d7, preparing ...e6-e5, a possible continuation being 15 c3 (15 e5 ♗xf3 16 ♖xf3 f6) 15...dxc3 16 ♗xc3 ♗f6. Instead Black suddenly sacrifices a pawn – but it's more like a small gift!



15 fxe5 ♘d7 16 ♗g4!

I believe my opponent missed this move. White holds the pawn and Black's compensation is objectively inadequate. Did my quiet play lure the GM into a false sense of security? Or was he still uncomfortable in Bird territory?

16...♕c7



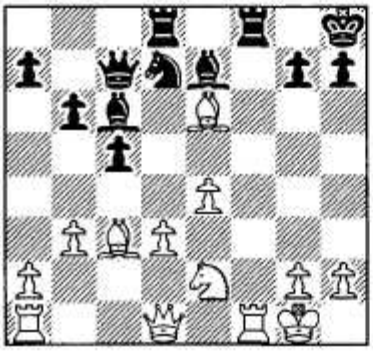
17 c3!

White must activate the queen's bishop. 17 e6 fxe6 18 ♗xe6+ ♔h8 19 ♗c1 ♖xf1+ 20 ♕xf1 ♖f8 21 ♕e1 ♗d6 offers Black good compensation as the bishop is not playing on c1 and Black also has good attacking prospects on the kingside.

17...dxc3

If 17...♕xe5 18 cxd4 cxd4 19 ♗xd4 ♗c5 20 ♗xc5 ♕xc5+ 21 d4 ♕g5 22 ♘g3 Black has nothing for the pawn.

18 ♗xc3 ♖cd8 19 e6 fxe6 20 ♗xe6+ ♔h8



One should note that Black does have *some* compensation for the pawn. the most important feature being White's backward d-pawn (and Black already has a rook aimed at it). If Black can trade dark-squared bishops he might be able use the d-file and the hole on d4 to drum up counterplay. All of which means my next move is a mistake!

21 ♘g3?

The knight should stay exactly where it is, defending the weak d4-square and ready to jump to f4 to protect the backward pawn, or shield it via ♘f4-d5. With this in mind White should continue 21 ♕d2 ♗d6 (or 21...♗f6 22 ♗xd7 ♗xc3 23 ♕xc3 ♕xd7 24 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 25 ♖f1 with a solid extra pawn) 22 g3! (22 ♕h6? is just a fancy way to lose time, e.g. 22...♗e5 23 ♕h4 ♕d6 24 ♗f5 h6 25 ♗xe5 ♘xe5 26 ♖ad1 ♘xd3 27 ♖f3 c4! 28 bxc4 ♕c5+ 29 ♔f1 ♕xc4 and Black is better) 22...♗e5 23 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 24 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 25 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 26 ♖f1 and Black doesn't have enough for the pawn.

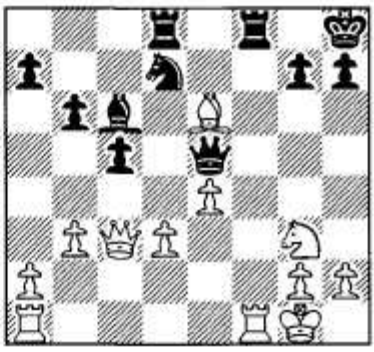
21...♗f6

Now Black equalizes again!

22 ♕c2

No better is 22 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 23 ♕e2 ♕d6 and Black is fine.

22...♗xc3 23 ♕xc3 ♕e5!



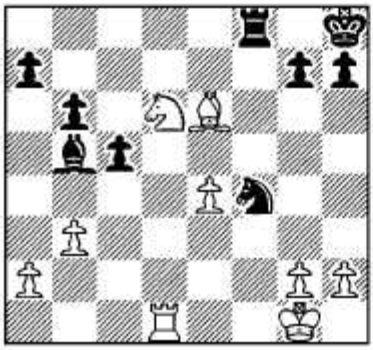
I had missed this idea. Black can exchange queens a pawn down as the d-pawn can't be held.

24 ♕xe5 ♘xe5 25 ♖f5

Much weaker is 25 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 26 ♖d1 ♖d8 27 ♘e2 ♖xd3 28 ♖xd3 ♘xd3 29 ♘c3 and the minor piece ending favours Black in view of his potential outside passed pawn.

25...♘xd3 26 ♖d1 ♗b5 27 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 28 ♘f5 ♘f4 29 ♘d6

Black has recovered his pawn and should draw with accurate play.



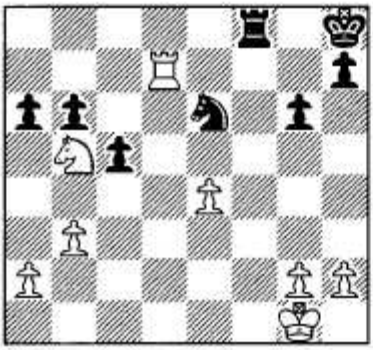
29...g6?

But this is far from accurate! 29...♗e2! diverts the rook from the open d-file. After 30 ♖d2 (White can force a draw immediately if he likes with 30 ♘f7+ ♔g8 31 ♘h6+ etc.) 30...♘xe6 31 ♖xe2 ♘d4 32 ♖e1 ♖f6 33 e5 ♖e6 the blockade secures equality.

30 ♘xb5 ♘xe6 31 ♖d7

White seizes the absolute seventh! This is much better than the greedy 31 ♘xa7? ♘d4, when the d-file closes and White's knight is out of play. Now White's passed pawn is very strong, especially when one considers the attacking possibilities of the rook/knight combination.

31...a6



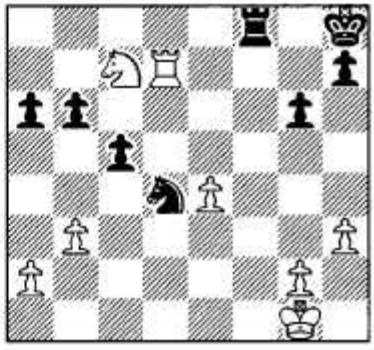
32 ♘c7?

The important thing, as mentioned above, is to use the rook and knight to attack Black's king and push the passed pawn forward. Neither the rook nor knight can do this on their own. Therefore White should avoid exchanges and play 32 ♘d6! with a clear advantage very similar to that which actually occurs in the game, albeit with the help of my opponent!

32...♘d4?

Black also fails to properly evaluates the position, and should instead eliminate White's attacking chances by getting rid of the pesky knight, after which the rook ending is a dead draw, as can be seen 32...♘xc7 33 ♖xc7 ♖e8 34 ♖c6 b5 35 ♖xa6 ♖xe4 36 ♖c6 ♖e1+ 37 ♔f2 ♖c1 38 ♔f3 ♖c2 39 a3 ♖c3+ 40 ♔e4 ♔g7 41 b4 c4 42 ♔d4 ♖xa3 43 ♔c5 ♖a2 44 ♔xb5 ♖xg2 45 h4 h5 46 ♖xc4 ♖g4 47 ♔c5 ♖xc4+ 48 ♔xc4 g5 49 hxg5 h4 50 b5 h3 51 b6 h2 52 b7 h1♕ 53 b8♕ ♕h4+ 54 ♔c3 ♕xg5 – dead enough for you?

33 h3!



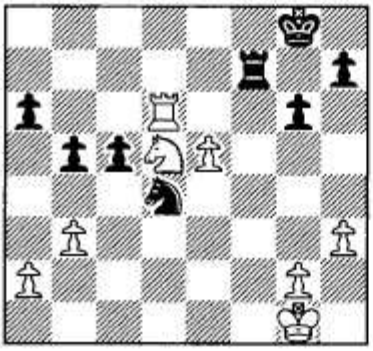
White avoids the threatened mate in two, which is pretty much all Black has.

Now the lucky white knight, being still in play, is ready to join ranks with the rook to lay waste to Black's position.

33...♔g8

After 33...♘c2+ 34 ♔h2 ♖f2 White wins by the straightforward advance of his passed pawn, 35 e5 ♘f4 36 e6! ♖g2+ 37 ♔h1 ♖e2 38 e7 winning a rook.

34 ♘d5 b5 35 e5 ♖f7 36 ♖d6!



I had learned my lesson by now, and kept both pieces on the board!

36...♔g7

36...♘f5 37 ♖xa6 and White is a pawn up with an overwhelming position.

37 e6 ♘xe6

There are no saves. 37...♖f8 38 ♖d7+ ♔g8 39 ♘c7 and again the passed pawn costs Black a piece. Notice how well the white rook and knight work with the e-pawn.

38 ♖xe6 ♖d7 39 ♖e5

White shuts off all counterplay.

39...♔f7 40 ♔f2 c4 41 bxc4 bxc4 42 ♔f3 ♖b7 43 ♖e2 ♖b5 44 ♔e4 1-0

White crosses with his king but Black can't do the same, as 44...♔e6 is met by 45 ♘c7+. Therefore White will soon win the c-pawn, when there is nothing left but a straightforward exploitation of the extra piece.

Summary

This chapter may be psychologically difficult for Bird players (it was for me, too!) but you have to accept it. The fact is, to a certain extent you do have to play the opposition's game when your Bird is countered with 1...c5 – *if* you want to strive for an opening advantage. You must leave the comfort of A02-A03 and deal with B21! However, I've made this as painless as possible. The rather rarely played (though admittedly Sicilian) 4 ♗e2 seems to give White good chances for an advantage.

The standard f4-f5 attack shows up in Games 46 and 48, but one should especially note Campora's central play and tempo-saving c2-c3 and d2-d4 of Game 47. Also in Game 48, be aware of the tempo situation – if Black falls behind, do not hesitate to attack!

Finally, Game 49 shows what to do if you insist on keeping your own opening! *Don't* attack a tempo down, as I did against Matikozyan. *Do* play solidly and maintain equality, while watching for a mistake from your sleepy opponent!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Unusual Defences

According to ChessBase.com, nineteen of the twenty possible legal moves have been tried by Black against 1 f4 (for some reason, excepting only 1...♘a6, which I think would be far more logical than 1...h5, for example, which *has* been played!). Now if you can't figure out how to handle 1...h5, you need a different chess book! But I will take a quick look here at some of the more significant tries.

Following these short-takes, I will analyze what I consider to be the most important of the unusual moves, namely 1...b6 (Game 50), the King's Indian set-up with 1...♘f6 and 2...g6 (Game 51) and what I believe is the most important of all the rarely played lines, 1...f5, which will be seen in the final two games of this book (Games 52 and 53).

Short-Takes

a) In response to 1 f4 ♘c6 White should avoid 2 e4?! d5!, when Black had a good Nimzowitsch Defence in Taylor-Simms, Minneapolis 2005. Instead there is 2 ♘f3 d6 3 e4 e5, and now White can consider 4 ♗c4, transposing to the King's Gambit, but I recommend 4 d3 with a more Bird-like position. White keeps Black cramped and under pressure, there being no need to sacrifice a pawn. There follows a very impressive high level win – note the slow-building but lethal kingside attack: 4 d3 (the game actually reached this position by way of 1 e4 d6 2 f4 e5 3 d3 ♘c6 4 ♘f3) 4...g6 5 ♘c3 ♗g7 6 g3 ♘ge7 7 ♗g2 0-0 8 0-0 a6 9 fxe5 dxe5 10 ♖f2 h6 11 ♕f1 ♗e6 12 ♗h3 ♕d7 13 ♗xe6 ♕xe6 14 ♗e3 b6 15 ♕g2 ♖ad8 16 ♔h1 ♘d4 17 g4 c6 18 ♖g1 b5 19 b3 ♖d7 20 ♕h3 ♘xf3 21 ♖xf3 ♔h7 22 ♕h4 f6 23 ♕f2 ♖f7 24 g5! ♘g8 25 gxh6 ♘xh6 26 ♗xh6 ♗xh6 27 ♕h4 ♕e7 28 ♖fg3 f5 29 ♕h3 ♖d6 30 ♕g2 ♕e6 31 exf5 gxf5 32 ♖h3 ♖d8 33 ♖h5 b4 34 ♘e4!! fxe4 35 ♕xe4+ ♔h8 36 ♖g6 1-0, A.Kharlov-V.Tseshkovsky, Budva 1996.

b) Black has even tried a kingside version of the Benko Gambit with 1...g5, intending 2 fxg5 h6 with some play. I

recommend declining the gambit, leaving Black with a weak kingside. Here's a quick knockout: 1...g5 2 d4 g4 3 e4 d5 4 exd5 ♕xd5 5 ♘c3 ♕a5 6 ♘ge2 c6 7 ♗d2 ♕c7 8 ♘g3 f5 9 ♗e3 ♘f6 10 ♗d3 e6 11 a3 h5 12 ♕d2 ♘bd7 13 0-0-0 ♘b6 14 ♖de1 ♗h6 15 ♖hf1 ♗d7 16 d5! 0-0-0 17 dxe6 ♗xe6 18 ♗xb6 ♕xb6 19 ♖xe6 1-0, C.Schuckert-W.Kratzer, Zell 1993.

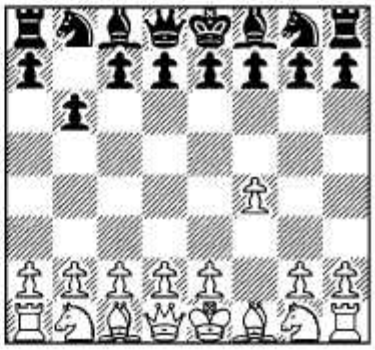
c) Against a Pirc-style defence I recommend that White play a system involving e2-e4, d2-d3 and ♗e2, similar to the Larsen line I recommend against the Sicilian defence. White can play this way against both 1...g6 and 1...♘f6. The following game is another example of the strong f4-f5 break: 1...♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 d3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♗e2 0-0 6 0-0 ♘c6 7 ♘c3 ♗g4 8 ♕e1 ♘d7 9 ♗e3 e5 10 f5! ♗xf3 11 ♗xf3 g5 12 f6! ♗xf6 13 ♗g4 ♗e7 14 ♕g3 f6 15 ♕h3 ♘c5 16 ♗f5 ♖f7 17 ♗xc5 dxc5 18 ♗e6 ♕f8 19 ♘d5 ♘d4 20 ♗xf7+ ♕xf7 21 ♘xc7 ♖d8 22 ♖f2 c4 23 ♘d5 cxd3 24 ♕xd3 ♘e6 25 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 26 ♕f3 ♘f4 27 ♖d1 ♖c8 28 ♖fd2 ♕c5+ 29 ♔h1 ♕b6 30 g3 ♘g6 31 ♖d6 ♕xb2 32 ♕xf6 1-0, T.Taylor-G.Fritchle, Burbank 2004.

d) Black can play his own Orang-utan. I follow Danielsen as he builds a solid centre and then attacks on the kingside, completely ignoring Black's queenside expansion. H.Danielsen-E.Pedersen, Denmark 1998 went 1...b5 2 e4 ♗b7 3 d3 e6 4 ♘f3 d6 5 g3 ♘f6 6 ♗g2 ♗e7 7 0-0 0-0 8 h3 c5 9 g4 ♘c6 10 ♘c3 c4 11 ♗e3 b4 12 ♘e2 d5 13 e5 ♘d7 14 d4 f5 15 ♔h1 c3 16 b3 a5 17 gxf5 ♖xf5 18 ♘g3 ♖f8 19 ♖g1 a4 20 ♖c1 axb3 21 axb3 ♗a6 22 ♘h2 ♗h4 23 ♕g4 ♕e7 24 ♘gf1 ♔h8 25 ♘f3 ♗e2 26 ♘1h2! 1-0.

Now let's look more deeply at four critical but unusual lines.

Game 50
L.Karlsson-E.Berg
Taby 1991

1 f4 b6



Surprisingly, this is played more often than we might expect – I have faced it twice in the last year, for example.

2 e4

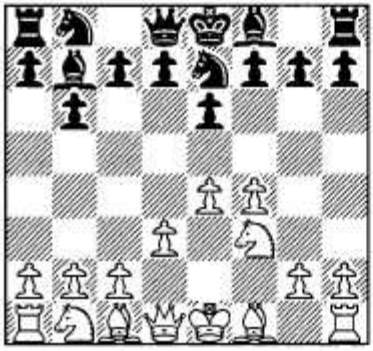
This is clearly the sharpest response. Of course it is possible to play 2 ♘f3 ♗b7 3 e3, as in Game 14, but this quiet response allows Black to transpose to other lines.

2...♗b7

My other 1...b6 game, T.Taylor-Alvira, Century West Open (rapidplay) 2005 took the following curious course: 2...d6 3 ♘f3 g6 4 ♗c4 e6 5 0-0 ♗g7 6 ♘c3 ♘e7, and now instead of my stereotypical 7 ♕e1, the interesting 7 e5 was possible. If Black accepts the proffered pawn he perishes immediately: 7...dxe5 8 fxe5 ♗xe5 9 ♘xe5 ♕d4+ 10 ♖f2 ♕xe5 11 ♕f3 and White wins by forking f7 and a8. Black must play solidly with

7...♗b7, but after 8 d4 White closes out the g7-bishop and fixes Black with weaknesses on the dark squares.

3 d3 e6 4 ♘f3 ♘e7

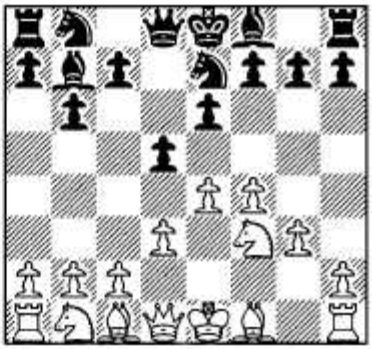


Black wants to play ...d7-d5 without allowing a hit on his knight with e4-e5, as would be the case after 4...♘f6 5 ♗e2 d5 6 e5 etc.

5 g3

This doesn't get to the root of the problem, and in fact gives Black counterplay. The good thing about having several Bird arrows in your quiver is you can switch from one to another as appropriate. This is a perfect example. The Leningrad doesn't help White, as Black has already neutralized the fianchetto with his own, and White's bishop will only indirectly protect e4, giving Black time to set up counterplay. The e4-square is key. One should overprotect this vital point, Nimzowitsch-style. So what Bird do we want? Clearly, the Antoshin! White brings the queen into play, holds e4 and develops smoothly, while Black's bishop has been rendered ineffective. Here is an example: 5 c3 d5 6 ♕c2 ♘d7 7 ♗e3 ♘c5 8 ♘bd2 and White is better, with more space and superior development, while the e7-knight now looks silly and will have to move again. White might even try a bashing Babionyshev attack with 0-0-0!

5...d5



6 ♗g2

After 6 ♘bd2 Black can make it difficult for White to castle with 6...♘bc6 7 ♗g2 dxe4 8 dxe4 ♗a6 9 c4 ♕d3 10 ♕b3 ♕xb3 11 axb3 ♗b7 and Black is fine. 6 e5 d4 7 ♗g2 ♘f5 is at least equal for Black.

6...♘d7

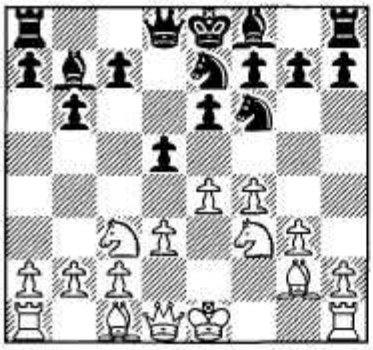
My feeling is that even though both of these combatants are strong GMs, they are also both totally confused by the unusual opening they have created! Instead of giving White time to shore up e4, Black should strike now with 6...dxe4 7 ♘g5 ♘bc6, forcing White to capture, but none of the three possible takes is that attractive.

a) 8 dxe4 (the worst of the three) 8...♕xd1+ 9 ♔xd1 ♘a5 10 ♖e1 h6 11 ♘f3 0-0-0+ 12 ♗d2 ♘c4 and Black is better, with play against White's king.

b) 8 ♘xe4 (the middle course) 8...♕d7 9 ♘bc3 0-0-0 and Black is slightly better thanks to the pressure down the d-file.

c) 8 ♗xe4 (this is best under the circumstances, but White is still struggling slightly) 8...♘f5 9 c3 ♘d6 10 ♗g2 ♕d7 11 0-0 0-0-0 12 d4 and White will have to watch out for Black's kingside attack, although the strong centre might provide enough play to equalize.

7 ♘c3 ♘f6



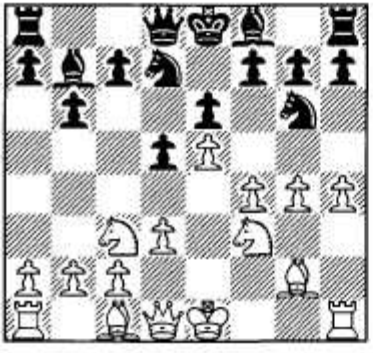
8 e5

Simple and good is 8 ♕e2, holding the centre with a small plus.

8...♘d7 9 g4

White could calmly play 9 0-0 but instead goes for this wildly aggressive and equally risky attack!

9...♘g6 10 h4



There is no turning back! After 10 h3 ♘h4 Black hits out.

10...h5

Black breaks up White's pawns, but also weakens his kingside.

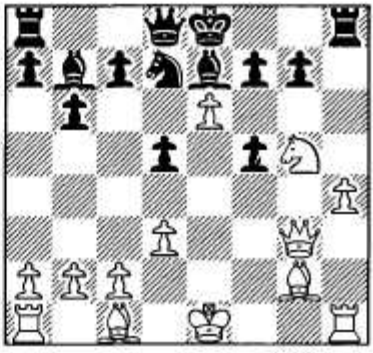
11 ♘g5 hxg4 12 ♕xg4 ♘e7 13 ♘e2 ♘f5 14 ♘g3 ♘xg3?!

Black shouldn't exchange his strong knight. Better is 14...♘d4 with a counterattack, e.g. 15 f5 (or 15 ♕d1 c5 with a double-edged, approximately equal game) 15...♘xc2+ 16 ♔d1 ♘xa1 17 ♘xf7 ♔xf7 18 ♕g6+ ♔g8 19 ♕xe6+ ♔h7 20 ♕g6+ and the game could end abruptly with perpetual check.

15 ♕xg3 ♗e7 16 f5!

The traditional Bird blow, for what seems like the thousandth time!

16...exf5 17 e6!



17...♘e5??

Obviously the powerful e-pawn can't be allowed to live, so 17...fxe6 is forced, when Black can end up in various slightly worse endings, but this is much better than the immediate loss of the game!! Play can continue 18 ♘xe6 ♗xh4 19 ♔f1 ♕f6 (19...♗xg3 20 ♖xh8+ ♔e7 21 ♘xd8 ♖xd8 22 ♗g5+ ♘f6 23 ♖xd8 ♔xd8 24 ♗xf6+ gxf6 25 ♔e2 ♗e5 26 c3 c5 27 ♖h1 followed by ♖h7, and White

is better) 20 ♖xh4 ♖xh4 (20...♕xh4 21 ♕g6+ and ♗g5+, winning) 21 ♘xc7+ ♔f7 22 ♗g5 ♖g4 23 ♕xg4 fxg4+ 24 ♗xf6 ♖c8 25 ♘b5 ♔xf6 26 ♘d6 ♖b8 27 ♖e1 and White has excellent compensation for the pawn, which probably amounts to a small plus (White threatens both ♘xb7 winning the d-pawn, while there is also ♔f2-g3).

18 ♕xe5 f6

18...♗xg5 19 ♗xg5 f6 20 ♕xf5 wins for White as the strong e-pawn supports the mate on f7!

19 ♕xf5 ♖h6

19...fxg5?? allows 20 ♕f7 mate.

20 ♘f7 1-0

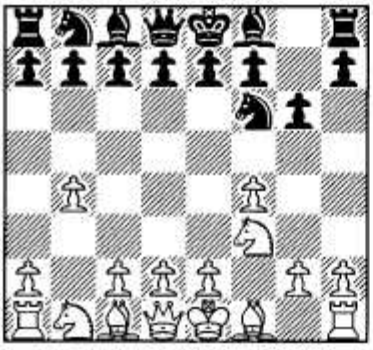
That's a wrap.

Game 51

B.Larsen-M.Raizman

Munich Olympiad 1958

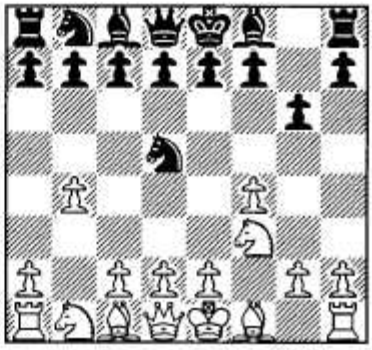
1 f4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 b4



White can also play the calm 3 d3 ♗g7 4 e4, as in Taylor-Fritchle in the Short-Takes section, above. Instead Larsen goes for the Bird/Orang-utan which was so strong in the reversed Dutch positions (see Games 5 and 16), but there are some important differences here. First, Black can snatch a pawn (if he really wants it) with 3...♘d5. Second, Black can contest the long diagonal with ...d7-d6 and possibly ...e7-e5, instead of weakening his central dark squares with ...d7-d5. All this means it's not so easy to force an advantage with White, although Bent makes it look that way!

3...♗g7

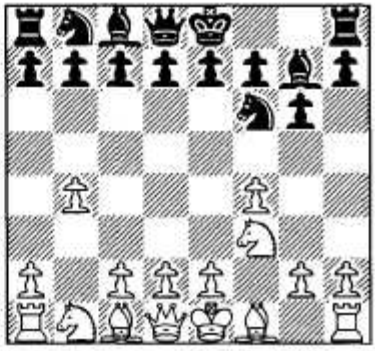
3...♘d5 forks two pawns and is therefore critical:



4 ♗b2 f6 (I suppose the untried 4...♖g8 might be playable!) and now 5 f5 is Rolf Schwarz's recommendation, which he assesses as clearly better for White, although it's not that simple. White has also tried 5 e4!? ♘xf4 6 g3 ♘h5 7 ♗c4 e6 8 a3 d5 9 exd5 exd5 10 ♗b3 ♗e7 (10...a5 11 b5 a4 12 ♗a2 ♗e7 13 0-0 0-0 and Black holds for the moment) 11 0-0 ♘c6? (11...0-0 is much more sensible, and while White obviously has compensation for the pawn in his raking bishops and Black's shaky king, it's still not clear that he has enough) 12 ♕e2 a6 13 ♘c3 d4 14 ♘d5 ♗h3 15 ♘xd4! (White gives up the exchange but the black king is under fire in

the middle) 15...♗xf1 16 ♖xf1 ♘xd4 17 ♗xd4 ♔f8 18 ♕e3 ♔g7 (18...h6 19 g4 wins as f6 cracks) 19 ♘xe7 ♕d6 (19...♖e8 20 ♖xf6 ♘xf6 21 ♘f5+! and mates, e.g. 21...gxf5 [21...♔f8 22 ♕h6 mate; 21...♔h8 22 ♕xe8+ ♕xe8 23 ♗xf6 mate] 22 ♕g5+ ♔f8 23 ♗c5+ ♖e7 24 ♕xf6+ ♔e8 25 ♗c6 ♖xe6 26 ♕xe6+ ♕e7 27 ♕xe7 mate) 20 ♘f5+ gxf5 21 ♕g5+ ♔f8 22 ♕h6+ ♔e8 23 ♕xh5+ ♔d8 24 c3 ♔c8 25 ♖xf5 ♕c6 26 ♖xf6 ♕e4 27 ♖f4 ♕b1+ 28 ♖f1 ♕xf1+ 29 ♔xf1 ♖f8+ 30 ♔e2 ♔b8 31 ♕e5 ♖c8 32 ♗b6! 1-0, WchessX-Ferret, Internet Chess Club 1995.

Returning to the main, Schwarz line of 5 f5, Black should play 5...♘xb4, which is the right pawn to take! White gets a huge attack after the weakening 5...gxf5? with 6 ♘h4 e6 7 e4 ♘xb4 (7...fxe4 8 ♕h5+ ♔e7 9 ♘g6+ hxg6 10 ♕xh8 ♔f7 11 h4 with an attack) 8 a3 ♘4c6 9 ♕h5+ ♔e7 and White is better after both 10 ♗c4, with a direct attack, and 10 ♘g6+, winning material. After 5...♘b4 White gets compensation with 6 e4 d5 (also possible is 6...♘4c6 7 ♗c4 ♘a5 8 ♗d3 ♘a6) 7 ♘h4 ♖g8 (Fritz likes 7...dxe4 8 fxg6 ♗g7 with inhuman play) 8 ♘c3 c6 9 a3 ♘4a6 10 exd5 cxd5 11 ♗b5+ ♔f7 (better is 11...♘c6 when, for the moment, Black holds) 12 ♖f1 ♘c7 13 ♗d3. Only now can we say White is better. Of course, with such an unexplored line, improvements for both sides can be found, but in my opinion the burden of proof is on White to show he has enough for the pawn. After 13 ♗d3 White won quickly: 13...g5 14 ♕h5+ ♔g7 15 ♘f3 ♔h8 16 h4 (not bad, but White misses a pretty instant knockout with 16 ♘e5! fxe5 17 f6 e4 18 ♘xe4 dxe4 19 fxe7+ and the long discovery wins) 16...♕e8 17 ♕xe8 ♘xe8 18 hxg5 (even with the queens off White's attack is too strong; Black can't take on g5 because that opens the diagonal for White's Orang-utan bishop, e.g. 18...fxg5 19 ♘xd5+ ♗g7 20 ♘e5! and White wins material or mates) 18...d4 19 ♘d5 ♘c6 20 ♖h1 ♘e5 21 ♘xe5 fxe5 22 f6 ♖xg5 23 ♖xh7+ ♔g8 24 f7 mate, Campioli-Colombo, Ceriale 1974.



4 ♗b2 a5

I don't think encouraging White's b-pawn to advance helps Black. The pawn exerts a cramping effect, while Black's a-pawn can become a target. In a later game Larsen faced the more natural 4...0-0. He answered with a double fianchetto, which I think is correct.

Instead, a couple of games show that White gets nothing after the more traditional 5 e3 d6:

a) 6 ♗c4 looks good, setting up Horwitz bishops, but there is a tactic for Black! 6...e5 7 fxe5 ♘g4 8 ♗c3, A.Kujawsk-A.Vaulin, Katowice 1992, and now instead of Vaulin's 8...♘c6? Black could get the advantage after

8...♘xe5 9 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 10 ♗xe5 ♕h4+! 11 g3 ♕xc4 12 ♗c3 ♗g4 13 d3 ♕c6 with a decisive material lead.

b) 6 ♗e2 is quiet and gives White no more than equality. M.Fuller-B.Cafferty, Coventry 1970 went 6...e5 7 fxe5 ♘g4 8 0-0 ♘c6 9 e4 ♘gxe5 10 ♘xe5 dxe5 11 b5 ♘e7 12 ♘c3 ♗f5 13 d3 c6 with a balanced position.

Thus after 4...0-0 Larsen's treatment is best, 5 g3 being reminiscent of the double fianchetto line against the King's Indian. There are similar themes here – B.Larsen-J.Barendregt, Beverwijk 1961 continued 5...d6 6 ♕c1 (protecting the bishop to make ..e7-.e5 more difficult) 6...a5 7 b5 ♗d7 8 a4 c6 9 ♘a3 ♕c8 10 ♗g2 ♗h3 11 0-0 ♗xg2 12 ♔xg2 ♘bd7 13 c4 ♘c5 14 ♕c2 ♕f5 15 ♕xf5 gxf5 16 ♘c2 cxb5 17 axb5 (takes toward the centre – Larsen loves to move in that direction with his wing pawns, keeping his centre pawns back until the right moment) 17...d5 18 ♖fb1 dxc4 19 ♘e3 ♖fd8 20 ♘xc4 ♘fe4 21 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 22 d4! (and that moment is here, leaving White much better) 22...♘e6 23 ♖xa5 ♖ac8 24 ♘e3 ♔f6 25 b6 ♘xd4 26 ♖b4 ♘xf3 27 ♖xf5+ ♔g6 28 ♖xe4 e6 29 ♖a5 ♘d4 30 ♖g5+ ♔f6 31 ♘g4+ ♔e7 32 f5 ♔f8 33 ♘h6 1-0.

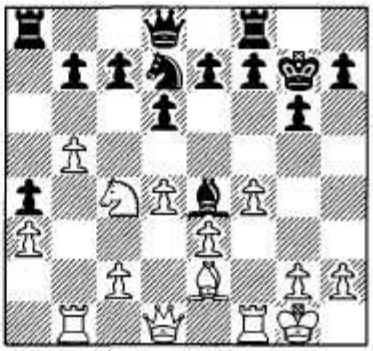
5 b5 d6 6 ♘a3 0-0 7 e3 ♘bd7 8 ♘c4 a4

A key point here is that, unlike the similar King's Indian position, Black can't play 8...e5 9 fxe5 ♘g4 in view of 10 exd6, and the bishop is protected.

9 ♗e2 ♘c5 10 ♖b1 ♗e6 11 a3 ♘fd7 12 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 13 ♘g5 ♗d5 14 d4!

Larsen seizes the initiative with a sudden central pawn advance. This is based on a beautiful tactic. At first sight it looks like Black can play 14...♗xg2, but that is not the case as there comes 15 ♖g1 ♘e4 (hoping for 16 ♖xg2 ♘c3 17 ♕c1 ♘xb1 18 ♕xb1, which would be playable for Black, but White has better!) 16 d5! ♘xg5 (Black loses a piece no matter how he plays – 16...♔g8 17 ♕d4) 17 fxg5 ♗h3 18 ♖g3 ♗f5 (18...e6 19 ♕d4+ e5 20 ♕h4 ♗f5 21 e4 ♗xe4 22 ♕xe4 also snags a piece) 19 e4 and there is no escape for the bishop.

14...♘e4 15 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 16 0-0

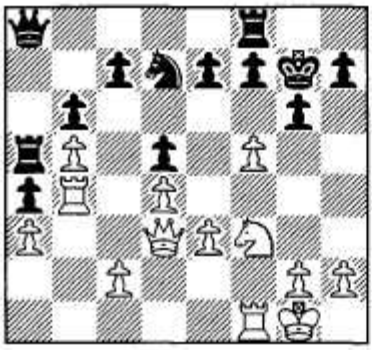


The Stonewall hole on e4 is not to be feared, as White has two minor pieces that can aim at the square. Meanwhile, with his solid lock on the centre, Larsen is already planning to attack the black king.

16...b6 17 ♘d2 ♗b7 18 ♗f3 ♗xf3 19 ♘xf3

Besides the obvious 20 e4 with a central pawn mass, White is also threatening 20 c4 and ♖b4 to pick up Black's vulnerable a-pawn – a factor which is a legacy of that pawn's impetuous opening advance.

19...d5 20 ♖b4 ♖a5 21 ♕d3 ♕a8 22 f5!



There it is again! The sudden f4-f5 break reminds Black he has a king! I watched Bent Larsen play speed chess at Lone Pine once against the veteran GM Arthur Dake. Larsen played the Bird's. The game seemed fairly even for a while, then Bent suddenly slammed through with f4-f5 and it was obvious Dake was in big trouble. 'What is that?' Dake asked in consternation. 'That is a king,' Bent said – and soon mated!

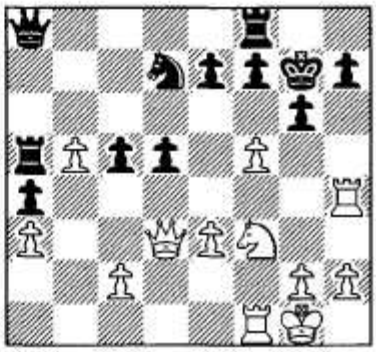
22...c5?

It is difficult to give this move a question mark as White's attack is not easy to see – but chess is a difficult game! After this move Black is virtually lost since every white piece storms the king's fortress. The mundane 22...c6 is called for, e.g. 23 fxg6 hxg6 24 bxc6 ♕xc6 25 c4 when White is of course better, with queenside play and kingside attacking chances, but this is nothing compared to the hammering Black gets in the game!

23 dxc5!!

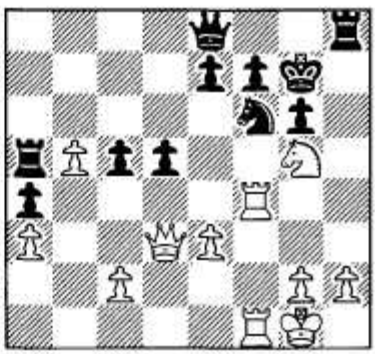
I'm sure this was completely unexpected by Black, White giving up his centre pawn so as to create a central pawn duo for his opponent. But Larsen sees that now is the time for direct attack, and all he needs is one more piece...

23...bxc5 24 ♖h4!



And here it is! The rook slips across on the hitherto busy fourth rank!

24...♘f6 25 fxg6 hxg6 26 ♘g5 ♖h8 27 ♖hf4 ♕e8



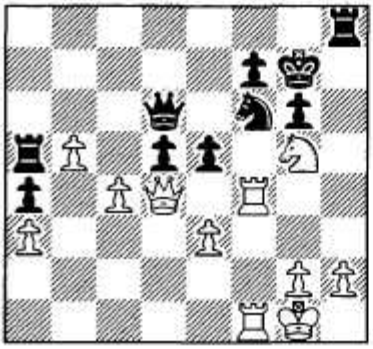
28 ♕c3!

Beautiful! The b-pawn is immune, e.g. 28...♖xb5 29 ♖xf6 exf6 30 ♕xf6+ ♔g8 (30...♔h6 31 ♖f3 mates) 31 ♘xf7 ♕xe3+ 32 ♔h1 ♖h6 33 ♘xh6+ ♕xh6 34 ♕f7+ ♔h8 35 ♕e8+ ♔h7 36 ♖f7+ ♕g7 37 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 38 ♕xb5 and Black has no pieces left! Alternatively, there is 28...♕xb5 29 ♖xf6 exf6 30 ♕xf6+ ♔h6 31 ♘xf7+ ♔h7 32 ♕xh8 mate.

28...♕d8 29 ♕xc5

White picks up a clean pawn, destroys Black's pawn duo, and then switches back to direct attack!

29...♕d7 30 ♕d4 ♕d6 31 c4 e5



A desperate hope! Could Larsen have overlooked this?

32 ♘xf7!

In a word, no.

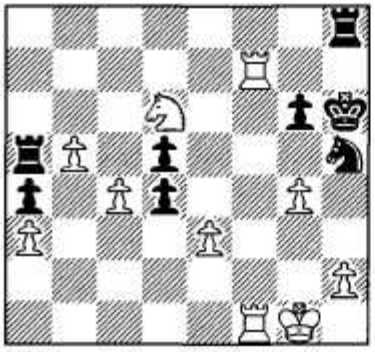
32...exd4

Also losing is 32...♔xf7 33 ♖xf6+ ♔e7 (33...♕xf6 34 ♕xd5+ wins) 34 ♖f7+ ♔d8 35 ♕d2 ♖a8 36 ♖1f6 ♕c5 37 ♖c6 etc.

33 ♘xd6 ♘h5 34 ♖f7+ ♔h6

34...♔g8 35 ♘c8 ♖h7 36 ♘e7+ ♔h8 37 ♖f8+ ♔g7 38 ♖g8+ ♔h6 39 ♖xg6 mate!

35 g4



35...dxe3

35...♘g7 36 ♖b7 dxc4 37 exd4 ♖ha8 38 g5+ ♔h7 39 ♖ff7 ♖g8 40 ♘e4 is similar to the game.

36 cxd5 ♘g7 37 g5+ ♔h7 38 ♘e4 ♖g8 39 ♘f6+ ♔h8 40 ♖f3 1-0

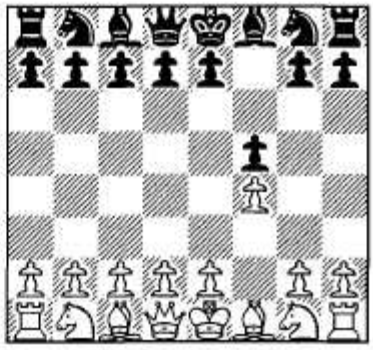
Black resigns just in time to avoid mate! This is a classic Larsen win, but could Black snatch a pawn on the third move?

Game 52

B.Larsen-P.Trifunovic

Sarajevo 1960

1 f4 f5



How many times have we seen the Bird f-pawn crash across the centre divide with great effect? I have probably given the thrust f4-f5! more exclamation marks than any other move in this book! This leads one to wonder: perhaps Black should blockade White's dangerous pawn on the very first move! After all, 1 e4 e5, 1 d4 d5 and 1 c4 c5 are all playable, so why not 1 f4 f5?

I think this is one of the best of the unusual moves, and White has to work hard to get any advantage, as is often the

case in symmetrical positions.

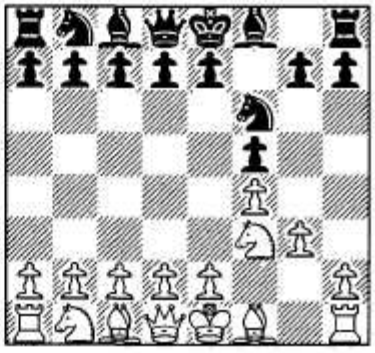
Essentially, White has two choices – he can develop and try to take the advantage of the first move into the middlegame, or he can violently try to remove Black's blockading pawn with 2 e4!?, which is a reversed From's Gambit with the extra move f2-f4. The present game features the former alternative, while Game 53 showcases the *opera violenta* of the reversed From!

2 ♘f3

After studying the main game and several other of the quieter variations I think White's best chance is to quickly fianchetto the queen's bishop, exploiting the slight weakness of the long diagonal. Larsen scored with this strategy in a later game, which began with his own opening, 1 b3, and transposed to the symmetrical Bird: 1 b3 b6 2 ♗b2 ♗b7 3 f4 f5 4 e3 ♘f6 (Black should probably play 4...e6 and accept the weakening of the long diagonal after 5 ♕h5+ g6, with only a slight edge for White) 5 ♗xf6! (Larsen breaks Black's pawns and thus engineers a long-term positional advantage) 5...exf6 6 ♘f3 ♗e7 7 ♘c3 g6 8 h3 ♗b4 9 ♘b5 a6 10 ♘bd4 ♘c6 11 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 12 ♗d3 ♕e7 13 ♕e2 a5 14 g4! (this does undouble Black's pawns, but also opens the h-file) 14...fxg4 15 hxg4 0-0-0 16 c3 ♗d6 17 0-0-0 ♖de8 18 ♕f1 ♗a3+ 19 ♔c2 ♗e4 20 ♖h3 ♔b7 21 ♗xe4+ ♕xe4+ 22 ♕d3 ♕e7 23 ♖dh1 c6 24 g5 ♖ef8 25 ♖h6 ♗c5 26 a4 ♔c7 27 gxf6 ♖xf6 28 ♘e5 ♖d6 29 ♕a6 b5 30 axb5 cxb5 31 ♕xa5+ ♗b6 32 ♕xb5 ♖a8 33 ♕c4+ ♔b8 34 b4 ♕f6 35 ♖xh7 ♗xe3 36 dxe3 ♕f5+ 37 ♔b3 ♖d2 38 ♕b5+ ♔c7 39 ♕c6+ 1-0, B.Larsen-M.Colon Romero, San Juan 1969.

Another fine example of this kind of slow, smouldering play is K.Sznapik-T.Wiesniak, Warsaw 1979, which began 1 f4 f5 2 b3 ♘f6 3 ♗b2 e6 (Black avoids doubled pawns but is unable to contest White's *second* fianchetto) 4 g3 a5 5 ♗g2 c6 6 ♘f3 ♗e7 7 0-0 0-0 8 h3 (White gradually takes squares) 8...♘a6 9 d3 ♘b4 10 c4 b5 11 a3 ♘a6 12 ♔h2 bxc4 13 bxc4 ♘c5 14 ♘bd2 ♕c7 15 ♕c2 ♗a6 16 e4 and White was clearly better. This was a Steinitzian model of the patient accumulation of small advantages!

2...♘f6 3 g3

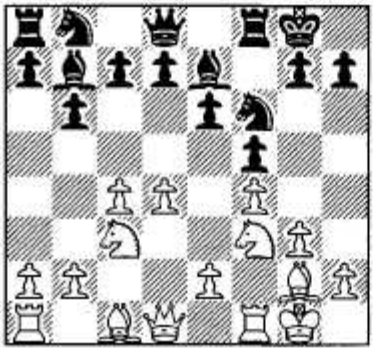


As we will see in this game, White will go astray by trying to do too much in a symmetrical position. It is also possible to err by doing too little! In A.Anderssen-I.Kolisch, London 1861 the great attacking player for once failed to do something and, after not so many moves, was soon struggling: 3 e3 e6 4 ♗e2 ♗e7 5 0-0 0-0 6 b3 b6 7 ♘e5 ♗b7 8 ♗f3 c6 9 ♘c3 ♕c7 10 ♗b2 d6 11 ♘d3 ♘bd7 12 ♘f2 e5! etc.

3...b6 4 ♗g2 ♗b7 5 0-0 e6 6 c4 ♗e7 7 ♘c3 0-0 8 d4

The alternative 8 d3 doesn't look like

much after 8...c5 but it's probably the best move. White takes e4 away from Black's pieces and can build up with ♗d2, ♕c2 and ♖ae1.



What happens in the actual game is that, from this point onward, Larsen decides he will win at any cost! Consequently he deliberately creates a hole on e4 but gains some space, planning to throw his centre pawns forward with wild abandon! I can't recommend this extremely risky play, but I do admire Bent's courage!

8...♘e4 9 d5

A further weakening advance, but Larsen has no interest in 9 ♕c2 ♗f6 with equality.

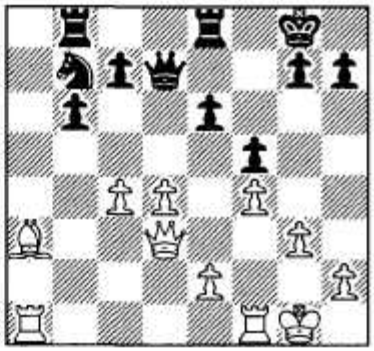
9...♘xc3 10 bxc3 ♘a6 11 a4 ♘c5 12 a5 ♖b8 13 ♘d4 ♗f6 14 ♗a3 ♖e8 15 dxe6 dxe6 16 ♗xb7

White can still maintain equality with 16 ♗xc5 bxc5 17 ♘c6 ♗xc6 18 ♗xc6 ♖f8 19 ♕c2 ♕d6 20 ♗f3 but instead presses on regardless!

16...♗xd4+

Black plays to equalize the game – Trifunovic was known as a drawing master. However, Black could already play for an advantage with 16...♖xb7 17 ♘c6 ♕d6 18 ♕xd6 cxd6, with the superior pawn structure.

17 cxd4 ♘xb7 18 axb6 axb6 19 ♕d3 ♕d7



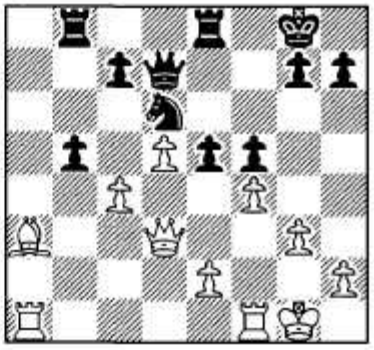
20 ♖fd1

Of course Larsen avoids 20 e4 ♘c5 21 ♗xc5 bxc5 with a level game.

20...♘d6 21 d5

The level of risk keeps ratcheting up.

21...e5 22 ♖f1 b5

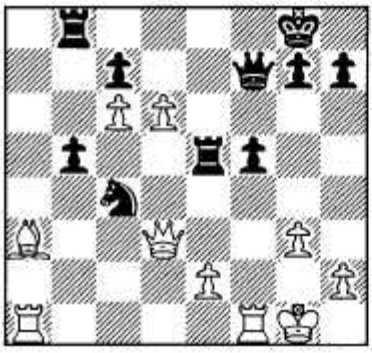


23 c5

Larsen passes the point of no return. Better, from an objective point of view, is 23 cxb5 ♕xb5 and the position burns out to a draw. But this is Larsen's character, his optimism – which Kasparov criticized in *My Great Predecessors*. Yes,

perhaps this lack of cold objectivity prevented Larsen from reaching the world championship but, at the same time, his risk taking, win at all costs style has provided chess lovers with countless entertaining games!

23...♘c4 24 c6 ♕f7 25 fxe5 ♖xe5 26 d6



White has pushed things way too far and should lose if Black plays the correct 26...♖d5!, e.g. 27 dxc7 (27 ♕c3 ♘xd6 and Black is up a clear pawn) 27...♖c8 28 ♕c3 (Black wins the ending after 28 ♕c2 ♘e3 29 ♕b3 ♘xf1 30 ♖xf1 ♖e5 31 ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 32 ♗d6 ♖d5 33 ♗f4 b4 34 ♖b1 ♖d4 35 ♗e5 ♖e4 36 ♗f4 g5) 28...♕xc7 29 ♕f3 ♕xc6 and a pawn is a pawn.

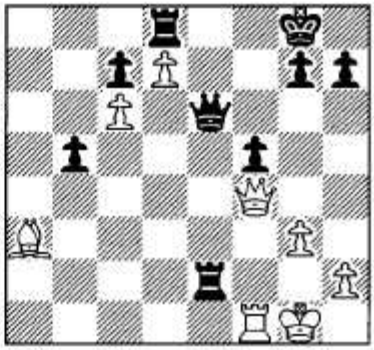
26...♖d8?

Black should not allow White a dangerous protected passed pawn on the seventh! Bent's wild risk taking pays off...

27 d7 ♕e6 28 ♕f3 ♘d2 29 ♕f4 ♘xf1 30 ♖xf1?

...Or *should* pay off! Instead of this routine recapture White has 30 ♕g5!!, winning in all variations as the pawn is simply too strong, e.g. 30...♕f6 (or 30...♖xd7 31 cxd7 ♕xd7 32 ♗b2 ♖xe2 33 ♖a8+ ♔f7 34 ♕xg7+ ♔e6 35 ♕f6+ ♔d5 36 ♖d8 etc.) 31 ♕xf6 gxf6 32 ♔xf1 ♖e6 33 ♖c1 ♔f7 34 ♗b4 and ♗a5 is coming. This would have been a dramatic finish!

30...♖xe2!



But after this blow there is only agony. Now it is *Black* who is winning in all variations. The mate threats created by the rook on the seventh, co-operating with the queen, prevent White from making anything of his strong pawn.

31 ♕xf5

Everything loses:

a) 31 ♕g5 ♖xd7! 32 cxd7 (or 32 ♕xf5 ♕xf5 33 cxd7 ♕xf1+ 34 ♔xf1 ♖d2 with an easy ending) 32...♕b6+ 33 ♔h1 ♕c6+ 34 ♔g1 ♕g2 mate.

b) 31 ♕h4 ♖xd7 wins as above.

c) 31 ♕xc7 ♕e3+ 32 ♔h1 ♕e4+ and mates.

d) 31 ♗d6 ♕d5 (threatening mate) and now there is a split:

d1) 32 ♖f3 ♕xc6 33 ♕xf5 (33 ♗xc7 ♖xd7) 33...♕xd6 34 ♕f7+ ♔h8 35 ♕f4 ♕xf4 36 ♖xf4 ♖d2 and White's last hope falls.

d2) 32 ♕f3 ♕d4+ 33 ♔h1 (or 33 ♖f2

♖xf2 34 ♕xf2 ♕xd6 35 ♕a2+ ♔f8 36 ♕c2 ♖xd7 37 cxd7 ♕xd7 and the queen ending is easy) 33...♕xd6 34 ♕xe2 ♕xc6+ 35 ♔g1 ♕xd7 and (again) once the dangerous passed pawn has gone, White has no chance.

31...♕e3+

Now Trifunovic has completely given up on trying to draw!

32 ♔h1

After 32 ♖f2 ♖xf2 33 ♕xf2 ♕xa3 Black ends up a rook ahead, and White can do nothing with only his queen.

32...♕xa3 33 ♕g5

33 ♕xb5 ♕a2 34 ♕h5 ♕c4 35 ♕f3 ♖e3! etc.

33...♕e7 0-1

I feel sorry Bent didn't pull this one out with 30 ♕g5! but, objectively, his wild attack was unsound (26...♖d5!) and the better plan was slow pressure.

Game 53

J.Pelikan-A.Alekhine

Podebrady 1936

Put yourself in Pelikan's place for a moment: you're a strong master, but no one would say world class, and now you are facing the reigning world champion! What to play? There can be no other choice – the Bird!

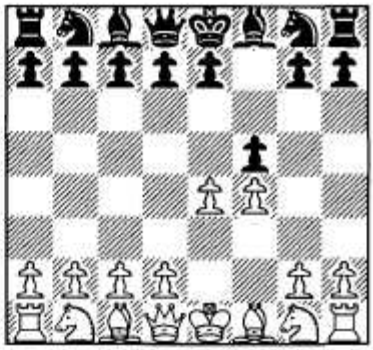
1 f4

You hope to get attacking chances against the great Alekhine, but then he plays solidly with...

1...f5

Blocking your ambitions! What can you do? Take a deep breath, look up to the heavens for a moment, and play the reversed From!

2 e4!!??



Now let's take a calm look at this madness! First of all, does Black have to take on e4 and release the blockade on White's f-pawn? There are a few ways to defend f5. I ran into one in a high school chess match many years ago. My opponent was afraid to accept the dangerous gambit, so he defended with 2...g6. I quickly played 3 exf5, he quickly recaptured with 3...gxf5 and I played 4 ♕h5 mate! My opponent was rather taken aback! And I don't think I'll ever win a shorter game with the Bird!

Much more reasonable is 2...e6. This often occurs in the move order 1 f4 e6 2 ♘f3 f5 3 e4, when White still insists on gambiting a pawn! This strategy brought victory to the unheralded S.Freiman against two extremely heavy hitters, Rubinstein and Bogoljubow. Here are the games:

1 f4 e6 2 ♘f3 f5 3 e4!? d5 (Rubinstein cautiously declines the gambit) 4 exd5 exd5 5 d4 ♘f6 6 ♗d3 ♗d6 7 0-0 0-0 8 c4 (White has a slight edge due to the first move in this symmetrical position) 8...c6 9 ♘c3 ♘a6 10 c5 ♗c7 11 ♘e5 ♘b8 12 ♕c2 ♘e4 13 ♗e3 ♗e6 14 g4 g6

15 gxf5 gxf5 16 ♔h1 ♕f6 17 ♗xe4 fxe4 18 f5!! (the ever popular blow!) 18...♗xf5 19 ♘g4! ♗xg4 (19...♕e6 20 ♘h6+ ♔h8 21 ♕g2 is decisive) 20 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 21 ♖g1 ♖g6 22 ♖xg4 ♖xg4 23 ♕b3! ♘d7 24 ♘xd5 cxd5 25 ♕xd5+ ♔h8 26 ♕xd7 ♖g7 27 ♕f5 ♔g8 28 ♗g5 ♖e8 29 d5 ♖f7 30 ♕h3 ♖ef8 31 ♕e6 ♔h8 32 ♗h4 1-0, S.Freiman-A.Rubinstein, Vilnius 1912. Black's e-pawn falls, there are no good checks, and the d5-pawn is going through.

Bogoljubow accepted the gambit with 3...fxe4 4 ♘g5 ♘f6 5 d3 h6 (5...exd3 6 ♗xd3 transposes to the Bird-Gelbfuhs debacle, given in the next note) 6 ♘xe4 d5 7 ♘f2 c5 8 ♗e2 ♘c6 9 ♗h5+ ♘xh5 10 ♕xh5+ ♔d7 (what is the black king doing here?) 11 0-0 ♕e8 12 ♕d1 ♗d6 13 c4! ♕f7 14 ♘c3 a6 15 f5! (the famous blow yet again!) 15...dxc4 16 dxc4 exf5 17 ♘fe4 ♘d4 18 ♘d5 ♖d8 19 b4! (White crashes through) 19...♗e5 20 ♘xc5+ ♔c6 21 ♗f4 ♗xf4 22 ♕xd4 ♗d6 1-0, S.Freiman-E.Bogoljubow, St Petersburg 1914. Black resigned before White played out the mate in four with 23 b5+ axb5 24 cxb5+ ♔b5 25 ♖ab1+ and mate next move.

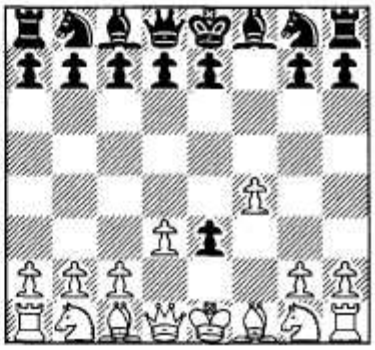
Finally, Black can defend with 2...d6, but in F.Burgi-W.Geiger, Lienz 1988, Black had no joy after the simple 3 e5 cramped his game. The continuation was 3...d5 4 d4 e6 5 ♘f3 ♗e7 6 c4 ♘h6 7 ♘c3 c6 8 ♗d2 0-0 9 ♕b3 b6 10 ♗e2 and White was already much better thanks to the extra space.

We can conclude that defensive moves bring Black neither joy nor safety, so the second player is more or less forced to capture and free the Bird f-pawn. Yet Black is now a centre pawn up!

3 d3

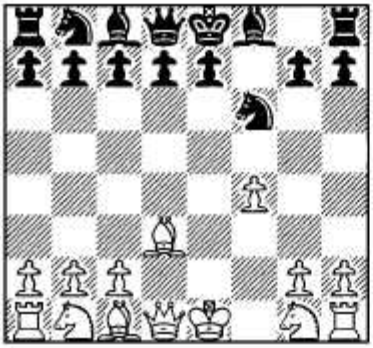
And now, on the third move, the world champion already faces a crucial decision from which there is no turning back: should Black accept the reversed From and take on d3, or decline the gambit by pushing? Not a decision to make lightly!

3...e3



Alekhine didn't like to take gambit pawns in the opening. He expressed his views in his book *My Best Games of Chess* in the notes to his game with Spielmann: 'On principle, in the opening, I never try to obtain such an advantage in material. It can only be had at the cost of time and delay in development, which often proves fatal.' The opening moves of Spielmann-Alekhine, Stockholm 1912, were 1 e4 e5 2 ♗c4 ♘f6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♘f3 ♗c5 5 0-0 d6 6 c3 d3 and, just like in this game, Alekhine pushes and refuses the gambit – and gets a slightly worse game! This was his style. But White now gets a development lead and an advantage in the centre, sort of like a Maróczy bind moved one file to the right!

In my opinion the best course is to accept the gambit with 3...exd3 4 ♗xd3 ♘f6, when there are the two branches, Lasker and Mestel, with – of course – that extra move f2-f4 thrown in.



The Lasker line is tempting: 5 g4 and now if Black plays the kingside fianchetto (so successful for White in Games 35-37) he gets an unpleasant surprise as the difference in the position proves very useful in these lines, e.g. ChepinPC-GlavinaIM, Internet Chess Club 2002 continued 5 g4 g6? 6 g5 ♘h5 7 f5! d5 (just as bad is 7...♖g8 8 fxg6 hxg6 9 ♗xg6+ ♖xg6 10 ♕xh5 with a decisive advantage in H.Raupp-W.Harrow, Midwest Women's Open 1982) 8 fxg6 ♘g7 9 gxh7 ♗e6 10 ♗g6+ ♔d7 1-0. However, Black has no need to fall into this tiger pit, and it is preferable to play Berescu-style with 5...d5. Now the pawn on f4 does nothing and even weakens the key squares g4 and e4. After 6 g5 both 6...♗g4 and 6...♘e4 leave White worse and struggling to draw. That leaves 6 h3. This quiet defence doesn't go with gambit play, but there is nothing better. Black plays 6...g6 (as now 7 g5 is meaningless since Black answers 7...♘e4, taking over the centre while f5 is held, with a clear plus for Black) 7 ♘c3 ♗g7 8 ♘f3 (8 g5 ♘h5 9 ♘d5 0-0 and Black is better in view of White's numerous weaknesses; Black should at least regain the pawn and so in fact remain a pawn up) 8...♘c6 9 a3 ♗e6, F.Waggerl-H.Hicker, Austria 2001, and now Black should simply play 9...0-0 and White doesn't have enough for the pawn.

I have to say that the Lasker variation isn't working out with either colour! So the Mestel, or I should say, original Bird, with 5 ♘f3 is best! Here's an example that might appeal to Hitchcock: 5...e6 6 ♘g5 g6 7 h4 ♗h6 (7...♖g8 8 h5 h6 9 ♗xg6+ ♖xg6 10 hxg6 hxg5 11 fxg5 ♘d5 12 ♖h7 with a winning attack) 8 h5 ♗xg5 (8...♘xh5 9 ♖xh5!) 9 fxg5 ♘d5 (9...♘xh5 10 g4 ♘g7 11 ♗xg6+) 10 hxg6 ♕e7 11 ♖xh7 ♖xh7 12 gxh7 ♕b4+ 13 ♔f1 ♕h4 14 ♗g6+ ♔e7 15 ♕h5. Talk about your savage Bird attacks! This was H.Bird-O.Gelbfuhs, Vienna 1873, when Black barely had time to resign here after a mere 15 moves! Now this beautiful and crushing win by the father of the opening is all very well, but what if, as in the Mestel variation, Black plays the correct 5...d5 – does the extra f4 help White now?

White can try:

a) 6 ♘g5 ♗g4! and the fact that White can't answer with f2-f3 (because of the extra tempo!) means that Black has an easy game, shutting down White's main attacking diagonal.

b) 6 ♘e5 e6 7 ♗e3 ♗d6 8 ♘d2 c5 9 c3 ♕c7 10 0-0 ♘bd7 11 ♕a4 0-0 12 ♘df3 c4 13 ♗b1 b5! 14 ♕xb5 ♖b8 and

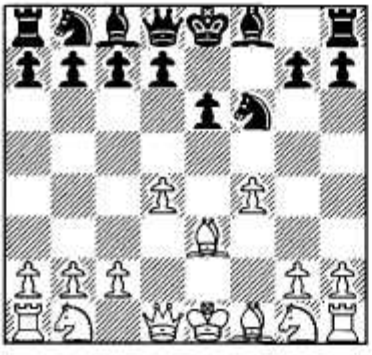
Black was already clearly better in R.Owens-C.Laurent, Email 1997.

c) Last but not least there is 6 0-0! which, strangely enough, is completely unexplored, despite being the most logical developing move. I could find no games in any database. And yet, as one sees other tries are insufficient, it is upon this that the future of the reversed From rests! The position is analogous to Nyman-Larsen, Game 42; the extra tempo is useful, holding back Black's e-pawn. Does White have enough? My feeling is White has *some* compensation for the pawn but it is not completely sufficient against steady development like 6...♘c6. As they say, practical tests are needed!

4 ♗xe3

Of course this is fine, but it's possible to delay the recapture, for example 4 d4 d5 5 ♗d3 ♘f6 6 ♗xe3 ♗g4 7 ♘f3 e6 8 ♘bd2 ♘bd7 9 c3 c6 10 ♕c2 ♗d6 11 ♘e5 (White dominates the centre and is already clearly better) 11...♕e7 12 h3 ♗h5 13 g4 ♗f7 14 0-0-0 and White took control, Babionyshev style, in P.Petran-M.Tepper, Rimavska Sobota 1977.

4...♘f6 5 d4 e6



White takes over the centre with his 'right side' Maróczy bind, which may be even stronger than the normal version (with pawns on e4 and c4). Looking at a basic feature of the position, note that 5...♘d5? loses to 6 ♕h5+, not that a world champion would fall for this, but the black king *is* exposed. In other words, after *five* moves, Pelikan has central control and attacking chances. He already stands better against one of the greatest players of all time! The Bird rules!

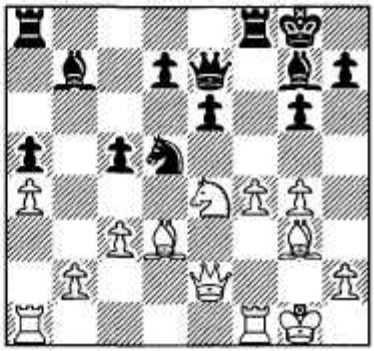
6 ♗d3 ♘c6 7 a3 ♘e7 8 ♘h3

An original development. White holds f4 so as to be free to manoeuvre the queen's bishop.

8...b6 9 0-0 ♗b7 10 ♘d2 g6 11 ♗f2 ♗g7 12 c3 0-0 13 ♕e2 a5 14 a4

White still has a firm grip on the centre and now stops Black's queenside play. Alekhine must have been decidedly unhappy!

14...♘fd5 15 ♗h4 ♕e8 16 g4 ♘f6 17 ♘g5 ♘ed5 18 ♗g3 ♕e7 19 ♘de4 ♘xe4 20 ♘xe4 c5 21 dxc5 bxc5



22 h4

White could also cash in his positional advantage with 22 f5!? and a knight or bishop comes to d6. It's hard to believe

Alekhine would defend passively. 22...e5 23 ♗c4 is a clear plus for White. One would expect 22...exf5 with sharp complications, a possible line being 23 gxf5 gxf5 24 ♘d6!? ♕xe2 25 ♗xe2 ♗a6 26 ♗xa6 ♖xa6 27 ♖xf5 ♖xf5 28 ♘xf5 with a lead in the ending.

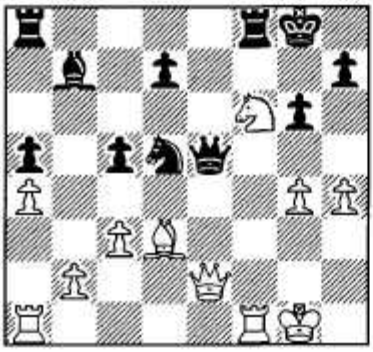
Instead of taking this '*bird in the hand*,' Pelikan (how many bird puns can I make in one sentence?) makes an interesting psychological decision – he simply generates an attack.

Given time, White can follow with moves such as ♖f2, ♖af1, ♖h2 and h4-h5. Perhaps panic is too strong a word for Black's next. I understand that Alekhine wanted to hit back, after having done nothing but knight shuffling thus far, but his move (even though it is the approved centre counter to a wing attack) has a serious tactical flaw!

22...e5?

22...♖ac8 digs in and is preferable.

23 fxe5 ♗xe5 24 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 25 ♘f6+



Bang! As I asked in the notes to my game against Becerra, Game 35: would a GM be likely to get a lost position after 15 moves in any other opening? Once again: would any reigning world champion be likely to have a lost position within 25 moves against a much lower rated player with any other opening?

25...♕xf6 26 ♖xf6 ♘xf6

Alekhine has only a rook and knight for the queen. The champion is objectively lost.

However, as Alekhine said himself, to beat him you needed to win the opening, the middlegame, *and* the ending. Pelikan has scored two out of two so far, but he won't be scoring any full points unless he passes the final test! Right now is the time to take a deep breath, sit on your hands, stop saying to yourself 'I have the world champion busted!' and figure out *the best way to win.* A little calm thought gives us the answer, for 27 ♕e5! is correct. This devastating queen centralization allows no counterplay, has three direct threats (28 g5 and ♗c4+, 28 ♕xc5, and 28 ♖f1) and in general gives Black no hope! Even Alekhine could not have gotten out of this!

Here are a few easy variations:

a) 27...♘xg4 28 ♗c4+ d5 29 ♗xd5+ ♗xd5 30 ♕xd5+ ♔h8 31 ♕xc5 and the queenside pawn majority makes it easy. Note also that any major exchange – bishop for bishop as here, or rook for rook – makes matters even easier for White by depriving Black of pieces with which to drum up counterplay.

b) 27...d5 28 ♕e6+ and now:

b1) 28...♔h8 29 ♖f1 ♖ae8 30 ♕d6 ♔g7 31 g5 ♘h5 32 ♕d7+ wins a piece.

b2) 28...♖f7 29 ♖f1 ♖e8 30 ♕b6 c4 31 ♗xg6 hxg6 32 ♖xf6 ♖e1+ 33 ♔f2 ♖fe7 34 ♖xg6+ ♔f7 35 ♕f6+ ♔e8 36 ♕h8+ ♔d7 37 ♕b8 ♖1e2+ 38 ♔f3

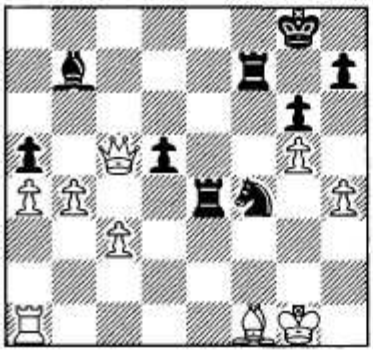
♖2e3+ 39 ♔f4 ♖3e4+ 40 ♔g5 ♖4e5+ 41 ♔h6 and Black is out of checks, which means the mate threat wins a piece.

b3) 28...♔g7 29 g5 ♘h5 30 ♖f1 and a rook exchange is forced, after which Black's scattered pieces will be no match for the white queen.

27 ♕e5 is a clean win. This is how close Pelikan came to defeating the world champion.

This is not to say that he does not have other opportunities later to put the game away, but one sees Pelikan's unsure, nervous play, while Alekhine avoids exchanges and finds counterplay. This was the exact moment to win the game.

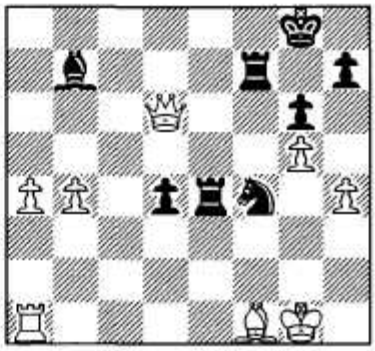
27 g5? ♘h5 28 ♕e7 ♖f7 29 ♕xc5 ♘f4 30 ♗c4 d5 31 ♗f1 ♖e8 32 b4 ♖e4



Even now it is not too late – Black needs to play ...d5-d4 to activate his moribund bishop, and White needs to bring his last piece into play. Therefore White can accomplish the latter and prevent the former with the exact 33 ♖d1!, e.g. 33...d4 34 ♖xd4! ♘e6 35 ♖xe4 ♘xc5 36 ♖e8+ ♔g7 37 bxc5 etc.

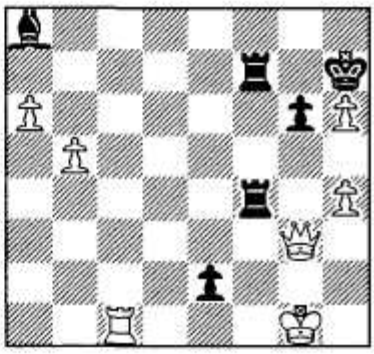
But alas ...

33 ♕d6? axb4 34 cxb4 d4



Horrible! Black has activated his bishop and has a dangerous passed pawn! Where did the easy win go?

35 a5 d3 36 a6 ♗a8 37 ♖c1 ♘e2+ 38 ♗xe2 dxe2 39 ♕g3 h5 40 gxh6 ♔h7 41 b5 ♖ef4



42 h5?

This should lose. White needs to run for a draw with 42 ♖c1 ♖f1+ 43 ♔h2 ♖7f2+ 44 ♔h3 ♖xe1 45 ♕xf2 ♖h1+ 46 ♔g4 e1♕ 47 ♕f7+ etc.

42...gxh5??

Alekhine must still have been upset by his brush with catastrophe, as on another day he would have immediately seen the forced win. Black has 42...♖f1+

43 ♔h2 ♖7f2+ 44 ♔h3 (no better is 44 ♕xf2 ♖xf2+ 45 ♔g3 [or 45 ♔g1 ♖g2+ 46 ♔h1 e1♕+ 47 ♖xe1 ♖c2+ 48 ♔g1 ♖xe1+ 49 ♔f2 ♖b1] 45...♖f1 46 ♖c7+ ♔h6 47 ♖c7 e1♕+ 48 ♖xe1 ♖xe1 49 b6 ♖b1 50 b7 ♗xb7 51 axb7 ♖xb7 etc.) 44...♖f3 45 ♕xf3 ♗xf3 46 ♖c7+ ♔xh6 47 ♖e7 e1♕ 48 ♖xe1 ♖xe1 49 b6 ♖b1 50 b7 ♗xb7 51 axb7 ♖xb7.

43 ♕xf4!

Pelikan saves the draw.

43...♖xf4 44 b6 ♗f3 45 b7 ♖c4 46 ♖e1 ♗xb7 ½-½

This forces the draw, as Black could get in trouble after 46...♖b4? 47 ♖xe2 ♗xe2 48 a7 and a pawn queens. After 46...♗xb7 the game could continue 47 axb7 ♖b4 48 ♖xe2 ♖xb7 49 ♖e6 with a dead draw. Neither player saw any point in playing that out, so the game ended here.

One must feel for Pelikan, coming so close to glory, but one must also admire Alekhine's resourceful defence in an ostensibly hopeless position (he went all the way to the brink of victory!).

Summary

Most of the unusual moves given in the Short-Takes section do not put much pressure on the Bird player. In general, one can meet them fairly easily with sound central play.

As for the last four games, the 1...b6 of Game 51 is well met by 2 e4, although White does not have to go as wild as Karlsson did! A solid Antoshin system could have given White a nice edge.

Larsen's Bird/Orang-utan versus Black's King's Indian led to another of his classic wins, but it is still an open question as to whether the third move pawn sacrifice is sound. I think I would prefer the solid d2-d3, e2-e4, ♗c2 system.

The symmetrical defence seen in the last two games is very interesting. My intellectual view is that, objectively, White's best chance for an advantage (but only a small plus) is with Sznapik's 2 b3 and subsequent slow play, but my heart is with Pelikan's reversed From! How many players will be ready for that? Alekhine certainly wasn't, as we saw, and sometimes the extra tempo can have fabulous results. However, if Black follows a narrow path (1 f4 f5 2 e4 fxe4 3 d3 exd3 4 ♗xd3 ♘f6 5 ♘f3 d5) there is some question as to whether White has full compensation. I recommend the unexplored 6 0-0, and good luck!

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10 ♔d2 fxe6 11 ♖xh2 ♕g5+ 12 e3 ♘xh2 13 ♕xe6+ ♕e7
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7 d4 ♘g6 8 ♘xg6 hxg6 9 ♕d3 ♘c6 10 c3 ♗f5

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2 ♘f3 g6

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